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The Bush Ranger; OR, THE HALF-BREED BRIGADE.

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TRACK," "ALAPAH," "ASSOWAUM," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE STATION ON THE MURRAY.

ALL was bustle and activity, life and joy, at the squatter Powell's generally still and lonely station, which was situated on the river Murray, as the shout, "The wagons are coming!" passed from mouth to mouth.

The wagons were coming, certainly; and a stranger would have perceived nothing extraordinary in the event. But he who has lived there, or is acquainted with life at a station, knows the significance and full importance of this news.

The intercourse between the stations situated on the Murray and in the interior of Australia, the owners of which are called squatters, and the rest of the world, is carried on almost entirely by means of wagons drawn by bullocks. These convey the products of the stations, such as wool, tallow, skins, and sheep, to the nearest town, and, if possible, to a seaport, and they return loaded with everything wanted in the bush—sacks of flour, casks of sugar, chests of tea, tobacco, horse-shoes, clothes, boots, etc., As the arrival of the wagons, particularly at distant stations, takes place only once a year, the reader can easily imagine how eagerly such an event is expected, how joyfully their return is greeted.

The small population of such a station, resting in the bush like an island in the ocean, have plenty of opportunities for the exercise of patience. Bullock-drays are an extremely slow kind of conveyance; and bullock-drivers, trustworthy as they may be, terribly sleepy messengers; and when the time of their return has to be reckoned by months, it almost seems as if it would never arrive.

Before breakfast, on the morning upon which our story opens, a store-keeper had arrived at the station at the full speed of his foaming horse, to announce the joyful news that the wagons were only a few miles distant, having encamped the previous night by the river, and that they might therefore be expected at any hour. He brought with him a large bag of letters and newspapers, intrusted to his care for more speedy delivery—letters from home!—only those who have spent years and months abroad, without news from the dear ones at home, can comprehend the blissful and wonderful feelings which fill the heart, as one opens the long and ardently wished-for messages of love and affection. Letters from home! Why, the post-mark itself is a remembrancer of our youth; the address, the seal—the name of our native town, with the somewhat old date, all suggest pleasant recollections; and the news itself, the beloved words the letter brings us—intelligence which stirs our innermost soul, telling that all those dear to us are

well and happy, still thinking of us with their old undiminished love—gives fresh enjoyment to our lonely existence. Such a day as this is indeed a joyous festival in the monotonous life of the settler: the letters are read over and over again, first in silence and alone, then aloud to the family circle, and the dear and beloved characters are repeatedly conned.

The Powells were no exception in this respect. Breakfast was served, but soon grew cold, for no one, with the exception of the children, thought of touching it. Torn envelopes covered the floor; open letters, hastily glanced over, and newspapers still folded up, were strewn upon the table in all directions; and the family were scattered, some in one nook, some in another, reading in silence.

John Powell was one of the wealthiest squatters on the Murray, possessing numerous herds and a pretty comfortable station—that is to say, comfortable for the bush. In a civilized country it would scarcely have been considered a proper habitation for a man occupying his position in life. But in the bush there are but few pretensions; and even the ladies, after a few years, which passed rather slowly, felt happy, or at least contented, in this new sphere, so different from the one to which they had been accustomed.

John Powell was a married man, with a family of five children, consisting of two daughters, the oldest being nineteen, the youngest sixteen years of age; and three sons, whose respective ages were twenty, thirteen, and twelve. He had settled on the Murray about seven years before, in order to obtain sufficient room for his increasing flocks; and of this he had indeed plenty, for his nearest neighbor lived about thirty miles from his station. In such a desert, amidst interminable forests of Australian gum-trees, the sole resources of his family were in each other. No wonder they looked forward impatiently to the time when their father, as they hoped, would dispose of his property and return to their fatherland. Indeed, most settlers, in whatever part of the world their lot may be cast, cherish the same hope, especially when they have brought their wives with them from their native country. Their heart is en-



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twined with the old home, whatever advantages their new one may offer; nor can they forget the old connections, the old places. Even when they are bound by family ties, the longing works and gnaws at their hearts, leaving them no rest until they can embark for the old and beloved shores.

This longing becomes almost irresistible when the letters of friends, like reminding messengers, knock at the doors of the heart. Pleasure and pain are mingled in the tear that steals down the smiling cheek. Each member of the circle seeks to conceal from the other what all would speak, and no one has courage to express. Each one fears to arouse in his neighbor's breast those feelings which torment his own, little suspecting that they are already at work.

The silence was first broken by Mrs. Powell.

"God be thanked! they are all well and happy, even mother," she exclaimed, trying to conceal a tear, and hastily brushing it off as she put her spectacles on the window-sill, near which she was seated. "The dear old woman has written herself, although she complains that her eyesight is by no means so good as it used to be. You must read the letter presently, John. She longs so very, very much to see us once more before she dies."

"Well, well; who knows?" said Mr. Powell, with a smile, putting up one letter and opening another. "My brother has reached Bombay, is well, and in good circumstances."

"Is uncle Ernest still at Quebec?" asked Sarah. "He promised to come and see us. Does he say nothing about it?"

"Oh yes, certainly," her father replied, giving the letter to his daughter: "there, read it yourself. He has left the army, and thinks of being in Old England by Christmas. That is his shortest way of getting here."

"His shortest way!" repeated Mrs. Powell, with a low and scarcely suppressed sigh. "It is thousands of miles!"

"It certainly is not so very near," said Mr. Powell, smiling; "but what are distances in these times? You go aboard, make yourself comfortable, and it is pretty much the same in the end, whether the voyage lasts four weeks or four months; you are only somewhat longer on your journey."

"How scattered we are about the world!" said Sarah, thoughtfully, with her hands folded over the letter in her lap. "What distances separate us from all those who are dear to us!"

"Certainly," replied her father, nodding his head; "that is the case with the members of my family in particular. Of the five brothers, only one lives in Old England. I am here, Ernest is in Canada, Edward at Bombay, and the fifth is now sailing on board her Majesty's men-of-war—God knows where!—in the Chinese or Pacific Ocean. That would indeed, be a joyful day, which should see us all once more reunited around one table! There is, however, little chance of that: we shall all be old and gray before that time arrives."

"I hope the meeting may take place in England," said Mrs. Powell, with a smile. "If some good spirit would assure us of the advent of such a day of union, I would willingly and cheerfully bear with every thing."

Her husband looked at her as if about to say something. If such was, however, his intention, he suddenly changed his mind, and was soon lost again in the letter which he had just opened and commenced reading. He had scarcely finished it, when he heard the barking of the dogs before the house, and the cracking of the long whips of the bullock-drivers announced the arrival of the wagons. The whole family, with the exception of the eldest son, who was in the bush, looking after a few horses which had strayed, stepped to the door of the house, to welcome the men, and see what they brought back.

"Well, Cole," said Mr. Powell, addressing the old bullock-driver who had charge of the leading wagon, "how are you? I am glad to see you at last. I suppose you had bad roads."

"Thank you, sir!" replied the man, at the same time turning the foremost bullocks round with a well-directed lash of his long and heavy whip, which he used with both hands. Thus he brought the wagon nicely to the door of the storehouse.

"Oh, woh, Diamond—woh! Back—that's right. Cursed—Beg pardon, sir; very bad roads indeed, and the wood scattered about the Billibong as if they wanted to build stacks of

it without end. I suppose you have received the bag?"

"All right, Cole."

"The accounts are in it."

"I have seen them already. Wool stands pretty firm."

"And flour too. I'll be—I'll—hem!— You have no idea, sir, how these rascally dealers go on with their flour. They'll soon not know what to ask for it."

"Gently, gently, my man; take care you don't burst any of the sacks. That's it; put them down here—the sacks together, and the rest there—in a row, that I may examine them together. The tea— Ah, there are the chests."

"Little danger of our forgetting them," said the driver, laughing, while unyoking his cattle, taking care to leave the unloading of the goods to other hands. "Life in the bush would be terrible without tea; you might as well be a dingo, or even one of those beasts of blacks."

His mate had in the mean time assisted him in unyoking the bullocks, and Cole, with a half suppressed oath, drove them away, to have their yokes taken off and to be turned loose in the grass.

He had scarcely got out of hearing, when as if to ease his heart, he commenced by giving the leaders a few sound cracks about the ears with his whip, and then broke out into a tremendous torrent of oaths. All this, however, was nothing more than an ebullition of joy at his return, and also as a compensation for the unusual restraint the presence of his master and the ladies had imposed upon him for a few moments. He knew very well that Mr. Powell did not allow any of his men to swear in his presence.

Cole was a thoroughly honest, faithful and trustworthy servant—the most kind-hearted fellow in the world, who would not hurt a child. Although formerly a convict, he had been liberated for several years. Swearing was his passion; and it is altogether frightful to what an extent cursing and blaspheming are carried on and have increased among the people in the bush. People are apt to fancy that this is one of the chief and most striking vices of sailors, who are but too prone to give vent to their feelings in this manner. But sailors are surpassed by the "old hands" in the bush; indeed, no comparison can be made between the two.

Almost every word they speak, even the most indifferent, is accompanied by an oath, which is but a friendly and well-meaning locution among them, something equivalent to, "How are you, my boy?" Their constant occupation with the obstinate bullocks may, in some measure, account for this bad practice.

This is one of the worst evils attending life in the bush, where these men are and remain entirely withdrawn from the softening influences of female society. The settler has, of course, his family about him; but the men have no connection with the house, as it is emphatically called, to distinguish it from the huts. Even the kitchen department is attended to by a man; and as at least nine-tenths of the laborers at the stations, or those who visit them, are liberated convicts, one can easily understand that their conversation is not of a very refined nature. It only portrays the harsh destiny of their life; and the "fine speaking" is left to the "swells," that is, to those who have a decent coat upon their backs, and do not belong to the class of "old hands" or "bundlemen."

With the assistance of the laborers who happened to be at work near the house, the provisions were at last removed in the store-house, although not immediately locked up. George, the eldest of Mr. Powell's sons, who had returned at full speed on hearing the cracking of the bullock-drivers' whips, was, as well as his younger brother, engaged an hour weighing out tobacco to the laborers, or distributing various trifles which they had been impatiently expecting for months.

The want of tobacco—that comfort of the bush—had been severely felt for the last few weeks, and the men put off from day to day for the arrival of the wagons. Their patience was quite exhausted; they could scarcely wait to be served, and the yard was soon filled with men, chewing and smoking, and looking as happy as possible. Life was now twice as lightsome; they had tobacco, and seemed to care for little else.

In the house, the letters had been read over and over, and their contents fully discussed.

George Powell, the eldest son, opened the parcel of newspapers, and was soon completely absorbed in the perusal of their contents. His father followed his example; for, besides the home news describing the state of affairs, there was intelligence from Adelaide and Melbourne, treating chiefly of the markets, sales, and auctions, which had immediate reference to their own interests, although only the material ones.

"Look here, George!" said Mr. Powell, after perusing the columns of his newspaper from Melbourne for some time; "horses fetched as much as £12 at the last market in Melbourne and Adelaide. I wish we had sent a lot of ours."

"But cattle seem to be so much lower," replied George, handing his paper to his father. "There you see the drovers have been obliged to sell a drove of cows at one-pound-ten per head."

"Lean beasts," answered his father, "which they send in droves, and bring to market half-starved. If we drove ours over, I feel certain we should get a better price for them."

"Yes, if they arrived in good condition," replied George; "but there is a scarcity of pasture on the road. In fact, I cannot tell what we shall do, if we do not get rain soon. Even the water-holes in the lagoon are beginning to dry up, and the grass is so thinly scattered, that the poor brutes get hungry walking from one blade to the other."

"Not quite so bad as that yet," said Mr. Powell, laughing. "Flour has risen too. I wonder at that: ship-loads have gone to Sydney. Sugar does not seem to be so high."

"Rice, also," continued George. "I am glad Cole brought some."

"Hallo, here—the bush ranger has again appeared," exclaimed the father, suddenly, taking up another paper, and glancing over the first column.

"The mounted police will soon be upon his track," observed George, turning his head and crossing his legs. "These fellows cannot evade pursuit very long now."

"Jack Loudon, alias Murphy, alias Bridol," continued Mr. Powell, reading aloud—"the fellow has a whole string of aliases!—escaped from Diemen's Land, with three companions, in a small cutter, and seems to have been wrecked upon the coast. Then he went to Adelaide, where he committed several frauds, was caught, escaped again, and now there is a reward of one hundred guineas set upon his head. Well, I suppose the police will look pretty sharp after him. A hundred guineas is a capital bait for them."

"A great many robberies have taken place in town; there is a whole column of them," said George.

"I should not like to live in the towns," said Sarah, with a deep sigh. "The worst people in the colonies are congregated there. I do not think I could sleep comfortably for a single night. I should always fear lest robbers should break into the house, or some other calamity."

"You are now accustomed to the quiet and retired life we are leading here," said her father, in a kindly manner; "and you would just as soon get habituated to the noise, turmoil, and activity of towns, and feel as safe in them. When we were at Sydney, three years ago, I recollect you liked the place very well; and I suppose you still remember how afraid you were here at some unexpected attack from the natives; and yet, you see, they never came."

"Oh, Lord! do not tempt Providence," exclaimed his wife, imploringly. "Are we more secure now than we were seven years ago?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Powell, laughing; "for we have not only three more men on the station, but our sons have grown up, and learned to break in a horse and to use a gun. This is equal to six men for purposes of defense, and they are worth a whole tribe of such cowardly fellows as the natives. I should not be afraid now if sixty of them were to come against us. Besides, they are so afraid of their own evil spirits, that they never venture to make an attack after dark."

"Yet sometimes, when all our people are scattered about in the bush, a strange feeling of fear creeps over me," said Mrs. Powell; "and when I look at these letters, and think of the safety in which those who have written them live—"

"Why, it is only lately that you have grown so melancholy," Mr. Powell remarked, with a smile, trying to tranquilize his wife; "because

we have been more solitary than usual. With the exception of a few itinerant peddlers, belonging by right to the kitchen, we have not had a single visitor; and the roads seem to be perfectly deserted."

"Who is likely to wander in these distant and solitary places?" replied his wife, with a shake of the head. "Sometimes, perhaps, a few cattle-drivers, or a grazier looking out for new pasture-ground, may come this way; but these people cannot supply what we want. Last year, we had the pleasure of seeing young M'Donald; since he left, so suddenly, we have scarcely had a single visitor."

"It is very strange, indeed," said Mr. Powell, dropping the paper, "that M'Donald should have disappeared so suddenly, without having given us any intimation of his intentions, or left any trace of his destination. I really begin to fear he has fallen into the hands of some desperate bush ranger. I recollect there was a report, just then, that several of them were haunting the bush, and M'Donald did not look as if he would let them rob him quietly."

"I am much more afraid he has fallen a prey to the blacks," said George, a slight-made, blue-eyed, fair-haired young fellow, with an open and honest countenance, thoroughly sun-burnt. "If I were certain that such were the case, I would make the black curs pay for it dearly enough."

"They are innocent in this instance," replied his father, firmly. "You know very well I caused inquiries to be made after him at the different stations, and we only lost traces of him in the well-occupied districts, where he could have nothing to fear from the blacks."

"Oh, do not be afraid, he will turn up some day," said Lisbeth, the second and more lively daughter, with a laugh. "Why, he only went away to get a few books which Sarah was anxious to have, and, as he very probably could not find them in Melbourne, has no doubt gone over to England to fetch them. In that case, he could scarcely have got back yet."

Sarah listened to the conversation without making any remark; but her eyes wandered almost unconsciously over the columns of the newspaper she was holding in her hands. At the jesting allusion of her sister, her cheeks, which had first turned very pale, were suffused with blushes.

Sarah was a lovely flower of the bush. She was beautiful as the soft sunlight, with deep, dark hazel eyes, full of expression. She scarcely knew another world besides the bush; for she had left England when a child, lived with her parents at Sydney for some years, and then removed with them to the remotest regions of Australian civilization. There were, therefore, few memories to which her heart could cling; but on those it fixed the more firmly. One of those pleasant periods in her life had been the appearance of a young squatter, who came from Melbourne, spent about a fortnight with them, left suddenly and was never heard of again. Lisbeth's jest, however, was not without foundation. Sarah's wish to obtain a few books in her solitude, among which were Thomas Moore's "Lalla Rookh," and Sir Walter Scott's "Lady of the Lake," was actually the cause why M'Donald, with a sort of chivalrous gallantry, left the station, mounted his horse, and repaired to the distant town. He certainly promised to return within eight weeks at the latest: but an entire year had now passed away, and all attempts to discover what had become of him proved abortive.

"Pray do not jest about these things, my dear child," said Mrs. Powell, perceiving the painful impression which these words had produced upon Sarah's mind. "Who knows what may have happened to the poor unfortunate young man? Let us hope, however, that God has protected him. I should be very glad indeed, to greet his open and manly countenance once more, that we may not have to reproach ourselves with being the cause of any misfortune that may have happened to him."

"You must not make yourself weary with such thoughts," Mr. Powell observed. "In this vast Australia, men will wander about strangely by themselves. I have frequently met suddenly with people whom I had long thought dead, and who had merely been led from one place to another by accident; and they would again as quickly disappear in pursuit of their occupations. But a man like M'Donald, looking out for a station, has particular reasons for keeping his whereabouts secret, if he has found good pasture-grounds, that they may not be snapped up by another.

Who knows on what excellent station he may now be rearing sheep and cattle?"

"Mr. Bale, the stock-keeper, is coming," said Lisbeth, whose attention was attracted by the sound of an approaching horseman.

"Mr. Bale? No, this is not Mr. Bale," said Bill, Mr. Powell's second son, who was standing by his sister, looking in the same direction; "it is a gray, and Mr. Bale rides a bay. It must be a stranger!"

"A stranger!" cried Mr. Powell, rising from his chair, and walking toward the window, where he was soon followed by the whole family. "Lo! it is, indeed—and, as it seems, some gentleman squatter. His long beard does not betoken the townsman, he appears to be a hunter from his gun. Go, George; welcome him, and show him in. Put his horse into the paddock. It is really true," he added, turning to his family with a smile; "good or ill luck never comes alone. For a long time we have been vainly yearning for some communication from the world, and to-day we receive letters and newspapers, and a stranger arrives into the bargain. He is heartily welcome."

CHAPTER II.

THE VISITOR.

NOT many minutes elapsed before the horseman, who could scarcely have had time to dismount, knocked at the parlor door, which, to George's astonishment, he seemed to know as well as if he had been an old inmate of the house. The astonished owner had hardly exclaimed "Come in!" before the latch gave way to the pressure of his finger, and the stranger, with a leathern bag hanging on his arm, entered the room with a hearty "How are you all?"

"How are you, sir?" replied Mr. Powell somewhat disconcerted at the familiar address of the new-comer. The other members of the family examined him with curiosity, while Sarah fixed her looks on him in anxious and painful suspense.

"I wish you," continued Mr. Powell, "a very hearty welcome to our quiet solitude, and hope you will make yourself comfortable, and consider yourself at home."

"I am very much obliged to you, indeed, Mr. Powell," replied the stranger, seizing the proffered hand and warmly shaking it. "But am I, indeed, so very much changed? Does this long beard alter me so completely that neither you, Mrs. Powell, nor the young ladies recognize me?—How the children have all grown up!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Sarah, while her parents still examined the stranger in silence and doubt, and the younger members of the family approached him with curiosity. "Is it not—is it not Mr. M'Donald?" As she pronounced the name a deep blush stole over her countenance.

"I am happy that you, at least, have not forgotten the stranger," said M'Donald, with emotion, at the same time offering his hand, which Sarah took bashfully.

"M'Donald!" exclaimed Mr. Powell, with a hearty greeting. All now pressed around their former guest, anxious to welcome one of whom they retained such pleasant recollections.

"We were speaking of you a minute since, and trying to make out what could have become of you," exclaimed Mrs. Powell.

"Cry wolf, and he will come at last, says an old proverb," answered M'Donald with a smile. "But did I not promise Miss Sarah the books, and was I not bound to bring them?"

"You see, I was right," said Lisbeth laughing. "He could not get them at Melbourne, went a little further—perhaps to London—for them."

"Not quite so far as that," replied the young man, good-humoredly; "but I certainly did not get them without some trouble. I may tell you of that one day. At any rate, here they are, and I hope they will interest Miss Sarah as much as she anticipated."

With these words the young man opened his leathern bag, and took out about half-a-dozen books, carefully packed up in oil-cloth, placing them upon the table before the blushing girl, whose looks sufficiently expressed her thanks. "I hope," he added, "they have not got wet. I was obliged to ford the Murray several times, and even to make my horse swim across with me on his back; but I always took the greatest care of them."

"There is a hole here," cried Ned, a boy twelve years of age who had approached the

table, and was examining and handling the parcel without much ceremony.

"It looks as if a bullet had struck it," said George, examining the fracture, and showing it to his father.

"It does not only look so, but this has actually been the case," replied the stranger, laughing. "The book probably saved my life; at any rate, it warded off a wound which might have been mortal. My pistol went off in the belt, and the bag, which I had just spread before me to take out some provisions, luckily for me received the shot. I hope the book is not spoiled. I do not think the thick binding, and the hard-pressed paper would let the bullet penetrate very far; indeed, I have not had time to look at it yet."

"And very likely you were far away, beyond the reach of human succor?" inquired Mrs. Powell, anxiously, with clasped hands.

"Far, far away from human habitation, from human compassion," replied the young man, in an earnest voice. "Far away in the bush, even without water, and threatened by a hostile tribe of blacks, set on my track by this unlucky shot. And had I been severely wounded, I must have fallen into their hands. I was only saved by Miss Sarah's books."

"I shall always consider this book as a dear keepsake," said Sarah, with deep emotion. "But were you obliged to expose yourself to such danger?"

"To such danger?" replied the young man, laughing. "Just ask your father and your brothers whether they are not exposed to the same accidents in the bush every day in the week? A horse may fall with them in its wild career; a furious bull may attack them, and mutilate or kill them; a swarm of blacks may pounce upon the solitary horseman—"

"Or some bush ranger blow out our brains from behind a gum-tree," added Mr. Powell. "Of course, we are never safe against such accidents."

"Safe from bush rangers at least, I hope," said the guest, with a smile. "As far as I know, nothing has been heard of these gentlemen for a long time."

"For a long time!" exclaimed George. "Look at the paper there; you will see a long account of one who has escaped, and upon whose capture or head a reward of a hundred guineas is set."

"A hundred guineas!" exclaimed M'Donald, with an expression of astonishment; "but how is that possible? I came direct from Melbourne, and I must have heard of so unusual an occurrence. A hundred guineas! I certainly recollect something similar. What is the date of your paper?"

"The date? Indeed I never thought of looking at that," George replied, searching for the paper among the rest; "but it is true, the wagons have been a good while on the road."

"The bullock-drays have brought this news?" said M'Donald, laughing. "Well that is not bad!"

"Ah! here is the paper. The 15th; well, it is somewhat old, certainly—the 15th of December in last year."

"And this is April," replied the guest. "Yes, then your paper may be right. What is the name of the fellow?"

"Jack Loudon, with a string of aliases," answered Mr. Powell.

"Quite right, it is the same. But he was soon caught again; and, as far as I know, the reward for his apprehension was duly paid to those who captured him."

"The 15th of December?" exclaimed Mrs. Powell, with surprise. "Pretty news, indeed! There was no occasion for much alarm."

"Did you ever see that man out in the woods; is he like a wild man?" asked Ned the youngest boy, who took a special interest in bushrangers.

"Why, not exactly like a wild man," answered M'Donald. "I once caught a glance of him in town, just as they were bringing him in prisoner."

"Well, how did he look?" asked Bill, with eagerness.

"Indeed, my dear boy," said the guest, "I am scarcely able to tell you. Such a sight always produces an extremely unpleasant, even painful, impression upon me, and I invariably try to get out of the way."

"You are perfectly right," said Mrs. Powell, assenting. "There is quite enough sorrow and misery in the world without running in search of it; and we meet with it at every turn, even when trying to avoid it."

"Oh, but I should so much like to see a bushranger hanged," exclaimed Bill, with sparkling eyes.

"Bill!" cried his mother and sisters at the same time, with an expression of horror and reproach.

"Who can put such bloodthirsty ideas into the boy's head?" added his mother, with a shudder. "Fie, child, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to entertain such wishes, but pray to God to drive them from your heart!"

"Oh, do not be uneasy about it, Mrs. Powell," said M'Donald, endeavoring to calm her. "Boys reared in the bush get into a habit of repeating what they hear in the company of herdsmen, shepherds, cattle-drivers, who, of course are not very refined. The boy's heart may at the same time remain good and pure; it is only youthful exuberance of spirits. I am sure when Bill grows older, he will understand that it cannot be desirable to see a fellow-creature, though a criminal, hurried from life to death."

"Then the blacks are also our fellow-creatures?" said Bill, half-sulkily, half-ashamed.

"Certainly," replied M'Donald, good-naturedly; "and savage as they sometimes are, I have no doubt that if we were in their place, treated, or rather ill-treated, by another race as we ill-treat them, we should be much more violent, lawless, and even perhaps more cruel than they are."

"I think so, too," said Mr. Powell. "Most settlers consider the blacks as little better than the wild dogs, and only increase the enmity and widen the gulf, which is already too wide."

"You stand on better terms with them, John," said Mrs. Powell to her husband, with satisfaction. "You never fire at them, nor set the dogs upon them; and I think this is the only reason that they have not molested us, or done us any injury."

"My dear child," replied her husband, with a shrug of his shoulders, "we must not rely upon that alone. I still trust more to the fear I inspire in them than to the gratitude which you think they owe to us. You must consider that I, as well as all the other settlers, cause them the greatest injury that the whites can inflict upon them. My being friendly with them personally, and not allowing my men to ill-use them, cannot make amends for this. With our flocks we have expelled them from their hunting-grounds, with our dogs we have driven their game, their kangaroos, emus and wallabies from the river into the malley bushes. Nay, what is worse, we have driven the various tribes, which are all hostile to each other, into a small compass, so that bloodshed has raged among them ever since. The blacks never will, nor can forget these things; nor are they of a forgiving disposition. Of course, those who add personal provocation to all these things, have only themselves to blame for the consequences."

"I suppose you know," said M'Donald, "that a tribe of them are encamped by the side of the river, scarcely half an hour's walk from here?"

"Indeed—no, I was not aware of that," said Mr. Powell, smiling, "but I could easily have guessed as much. We shall have their fires quite near this evening, and be able to see their carroberries. Where provisions are, you may depend upon it, the blacks will not be far off. As the birds of prey, or wild dog scents carrion in the forest, so do these cunning fellows discover when fresh provisions have arrived; they know very well something will fall to their share."

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and at the master's "Walk in!" the head stock-keeper, Mr. Bale, appeared at the threshold. After he had greeted the family, as well as the stranger, he announced that a tribe of the Rufus blacks—the same that had encamped in the neighborhood the preceding year, and had taken half a dozen sheep with them when they left—seemed inclined to put up their gun-voes near the station.

"Oh! they have got here already," said M'Donald, laughing; "they must have followed close upon my track."

"Yes, the black rascals soon come when they smell tobacco or bread," said the stock-keeper. "Shall we let them come near the station, sir? I think it would be as well to keep them at a distance."

"Of how many does their party consist?" asked Mr. Powell.

"Not very many," was the reply; "about

ten men, and fifteen or sixteen women and children. The old cripple is with them, too, and moves on his hands as well as ever. The fellow is tough as untanned skin."

"The poor man," said Mrs. Powell, as her sons had gone out to have a look at the blacks. "Do not disturb them, John. They will not stay long, and I am sure it must do them good to see human habitations again; and to be allowed to encamp near them."

"Do not fancy that, ma'am," replied the stock-keeper. "The rascals hate the white man's house, as much as they do the white man himself. If they happen to find an abandoned hut, they will sooner encamp in the open air than go in; ay, even when the rain is pouring down in torrents. If they do go in for a few moments, it is only to see whether they can find anything to steal; they turn everything to account. If I had my way—but, no matter—What shall we do with them, sir?"

"Let them alone," said Mr. Powell, good-naturedly; "if they grow troublesome we can easily get rid of them. Here is a letter that has come for you, Mr. Bale," continued Mr. Powell, going to the table—"two, I see—and, if you wish to have a look at the papers this evening, they are at your disposal."

"Thank you, sir," replied the man, taking the letters with apparent indifference, and putting them into his pocket, after a hasty glance at the address. But his eyes glistened, and his rough, sunburnt countenance which his short beard rather improved than concealed, beamed with an expression of pleasure. They were letters from home. Who could have resisted that charm? "Wool has risen, sir, I hear," said he, preparing to leave; "and horses, too, are said to fetch a good price. What do you think of taking a lot down, as soon as the grass gets up a little? What other people do we can do also, and we need not be ashamed of showing our horseflesh in the Adelaide market."

"I have already thought of it myself, Mr. Bale," answered Mr. Powell; "at any rate, we shall run no risk. Perhaps you know, Mr. M'Donald, how prices stood when you left Melbourne?—my information is somewhat old."

"They stand very well indeed," replied the young man; "at least for those," he added, with a smile, "who have horses to sell. The buyers had to give high prices."

"An excellent gray you are riding, sir," said the stock-keeper, turning to the stranger. "May I ask what you paid for him? I beg your pardon," he added, seeing that the guest blushed slightly. "It does not matter what he cost, I only wished to know what you think he is worth now?"

"I will tell you what I paid for him, too," said M'Donald, laughing. "In the bush, and throughout the settlements, men are always ready to sell their horses, provided they can get a good price for them. But the question, how much a horse has cost, is rather a delicate one, and is very seldom answered truly, especially when the owner intends selling again. I am no horse-dealer," continued M'Donald, "and consequently do not wish to make a secret of the price I paid for mine. The gray cost me, including saddle and bridle, fifteen pounds."

"Not too much perhaps, for a good horse," said the stock-keeper, "but, on an average, one cannot expect more than eight pounds per head. Was that the price asked?"

"It was the price offered, and the seller made no objection."

"I should think not: it is a very good price, but not too much. Can he leap?"

"Like a deer, and scarcely requires any water the whole day."

"An excellent horse for the bush; if I had a station of my own, I should ask you to let me have it."

"Well, when that takes place we shall perhaps make a bargain," said M'Donald, smiling.

"The sooner the better," replied Bale, with a bow, as he left the room. He had scarcely spoken a word to the ladies; only now and then his hasty glance sought their slender forms in the looking-glass, and he seemed to blush at his temerity.

After Bale had left the room, the conversation ran for a little while on horses, cattle, the price of wool—in short, the usual bush topics—enough to drive a man who takes no interest in these matters to desperation, until the ladies joined in, and turned it in another channel. Sarah unpacked the books, which fulfilled one of her favorite wishes.

The book hit by the bullet had not received any material damage. It was "Lalla Rookh." The bullet had only penetrated the binding, the title page and the first few leaves of the "Veiled Prophet;" and the now harmless lead dropped out as Sarah opened the volume.

M'Donald picked up the bullet with a smile, examined it a moment, and was going to put it into his pocket, when Sarah placed her hand upon his arm and begged it of him as a present.

"It belongs to the book," she said, imploringly; "the present would not be complete if I were not allowed to keep the bullet."

M'Donald gazed at her long and earnestly, and at last the girl quailed before his steady look. He seemed unwilling to part with this worthless piece of lead. But at last he slowly stretched out his hand, gave her the bullet, and said, with a mournful expression: "Well, take this bullet, Miss Powell. It is, perhaps, better I should give it away, or it might again prove dangerous to me."

"Are you superstitious?" asked Sarah, taking the bullet and looking at him with a smile.

"A little," replied M'Donald. "I am passionately fond of the chase, and half a sailor; and it is well known that sailors and hunters are all somewhat superstitious, they may deny it as much as they like. It is almost a necessary consequence of their pursuits."

"But now pray tell us," asked Mr. Powell, "where in the world you have been all this time, and why you did not let us hear from you? You may believe me when I tell you how anxious we were about you, and that we were actually afraid some misfortune had befallen you on your way, in fact that, you had met with ill-usage either from the bush rangers or the blacks."

"Well, I scarcely know where I have been and where not," answered M'Donald. "My plan was as you know, to settle down somewhere as a squatter and establish my own home. On my way to Melbourne I accidentally heard of a magnificent country for cattle-farmers, a paradise for sheep and cattle—rumors of well-watered pasture-grounds, which are as common in the bush as in the towns—rumors of newly-discovered coal-mines, which afterward turn out to have no more solid foundation than the brains of an enthusiast or a swindler. In spite of this, and spite of all my previous experience in this respect, I allowed myself to be led astray and to follow the false track, and spent a long, tedious and wretched time in the Malley bush, along with two persons, my companions in misfortune. The blacks soon got upon our tracks, and it was only with great difficulty that we at last escaped the double danger of starvation and their wooden spears, with which one of my companions received a tolerably severe, although not mortal wound."

"In what part of the country was that?" asked Mr. Powell, who, as a settler, took a special and very natural interest in this information concerning new pasture-grounds.

"Between the Hindmarsh and the Curon lake," replied M'Donald.

"I always thought some good runs would be discovered there," said Mr. Powell, starting from his seat. "And did you find nothing at all?"

"Oh, yes, plenty of blacks, but not a drop of water, either for us or our animals, excepting when we returned to the Hindmarsh to fill our water bottles and to rest the horses."

"Then you have not penetrated sufficiently far inland. I am firmly convinced there must be an old water-course and some good land somewhere between these two lakes. I wish I had been with you."

"Be thankful you were not," replied M'Donald, gravely. "I would not live that time over again."

"And have you given up the idea of finding suitable pasture-grounds?" Mrs. Powell asked, with much interest; "or have you come this way for that purpose?"

"That is a more indiscreet question than that of Mr. Bale with reference to the price of the horse," said Mr. Powell, laughing. "You know, my dear child, that a new settler keeps nothing in the world so secret as the direction in which he intends to look out for pasture-grounds."

"Yes, toward any other settler," said M'Donald, offering the old gentleman his hand, which the latter shook cordially. "But to you I can say that it is my intention to look out for pasture-grounds somewhere about the Murray, although the best places are already occupied."

"I assure you that there is nobody I should prefer having for my neighbor to you," replied Mr. Powell. "It only too frequently happens that we get a class of men among the settlers in our neighborhood who are not only far below us in education, but even in good behavior, that, with the best intentions, we cannot possibly associate with them, although we cannot avoid occasional intercourse. Nothing would therefore be more agreeable to us, and tend so much to improve our position. There will be plenty of room left for our herds. The country is large, and when they have increased so much as to force us to look out for another run, I have no doubt we shall find one. Children, too, mostly scatter as soon as they have reached the right age, and get fledged. Come, let us drink to our good-fellowship, Mr. M'Donald," he added, as Sarah, who, at a signal from her mother, had gone away, returned with a bottle of sherry and a few glasses, which Mr. Powell filled, and offered one to his guest.

"With all my heart!" replied the young man with a deep sigh, and emptied his glass.

A loud "Coo-eeh!"—the usual call of the blacks, which many of the whites inland have also appropriated—was heard outside.

"Ah! there are our black guests already," said Mr. Powell, laughing. "I was certain they would not be long before they availed themselves of the permission to come to the station. On the whole, they never commit any mischief, except in departing; as long as they remain at the station, they are very careful not to touch property which is not theirs."

"By doing so at their departure, it seems to me they expose themselves to a somewhat rough reception if they visit the place again," said M'Donald.

"They never think of that," returned Mr. Powell. "Nevertheless they have among themselves some sort of a moral code of laws, however light their principles may be. But, from what I have seen of them during the course of a long experience, I should be inclined to believe they have among themselves a sort of right of *prescription* respecting such petty, or even more serious misdemeanors, in virtue of which an unpleasant occurrence is not spoken of after the lapse of a certain number of months. Thus, I have known several cases in which blacks, after having murdered a white man, suddenly disappeared, and all endeavors to discover their whereabouts proved unavailing. After the lapse of six months they turned up, perfectly unconcerned—in fact, ran into the hands of the police, as if they had had nothing to do whatever with bloodshed and murder. Some of them have thus voluntarily, or rather unconsciously, surrendered into the hands of offended laws, and when first examined, seemed to be very indignant that an affair already 'six moons' old should be stirred up."

"This would certainly give me a key to many transactions of theirs," observed M'Donald. "But will you not come and see them? To tell you the truth, it occurred to me to-day, as I rode past the tribe, whether I might not persuade two or three of these fellows to accompany me into the bush, to look out for cattle runs."

"I should not advise you to have anything to do with them," Mr. Powell remarked seriously.

"For God's sake, do not trust them!" exclaimed Mrs. Powell. "They are all, even the best of them, treacherous; and depend upon it that, in spite of obligations you may have conferred upon any one of them, it will not be safe for you, when you are alone, to stand with your back turned toward him. If he has his club in his hands, he cannot resist the temptation of murdering you."

"There is certainly a great deal of truth in what you say," Mr. Powell observed. "In the district of Sydney, then much wilder than now where I commenced sheep farming I had for a neighbor a Scotchman. He was a very great friend of the blacks, and always had about him a black lad, of sixteen years of age, whose life he had saved when a mere child; and, indeed, this lad showed much more attachment to him than I had ever seen exhibited by a black. Once they were together in the wood cutting down a tree. Suddenly the black came running to the station alone, and with a bloody ax in his hand, wailing and lamenting, and, with the most unfeigned signs of repentance and grief, accused himself of having murdered

his master. According to his own evidence he had *not*, while standing near him with his ax in his hand, *been able* to resist the temptation of striking him as he turned his back. The blow produced instant death; and the black was at first quite beside himself with the idea that he had killed his benefactor. They were going to imprison him for his deed, but he found means to escape, and was never seen again in those parts."

"These are isolated cases," replied M'Donald. "I know, on the other hand, instances of blacks proving honest and faithful, for a short period at least; whether it would be advisable to trust them in the long run, I really cannot tell. But do not be uneasy on my account. Were I to take a black with me into the bush, I should choose my man, and mind to make it his interest to remain faithful to me."

"If you can do that you are safe," said Mr. Powell, laughing, putting on his straw hat. "Now, if you have no objection, we will go over to the blacks, who are already putting up their gunyoes and lighting their fires, if I am not mistaken. We shall be back by dinner-time."

Taking his guest by the arm, Mr. Powell led him across the open space before the house, and went in the direction of a copse adjoining the outer buildings, whence the barking of the tomahawks and the wild yelping of dogs announced the presence of the blacks.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLACKS.

At the distance of scarcely four hundred paces from Mr. Powell's homestead, on the banks of the Murray, the bush commenced. Large gum-trees, standing alone, were scattered about, as in a park; the ground was trodden down sufficiently to allow no grass to grow; while here and there a low underwood called the "tea bush"—for what reason remains a mystery—formed of stiff and broomy shrubs, grew up in small tufts. The height of the trees would of itself have shown the proximity of water, even had the merry and metallike "ting-ting" of the remarkable little bell bird, whose presence is always the surest indication of water, not been heard among the branches.

Close to this somewhat narrow line of woods, stretching out in the direction of the Malley hills, was a low, sandy, and almost bare elevation, which formed the western limit of the station. Under this, and sheltered by the gum-trees, the above-mentioned tribe were busily engaged in stripping the bark off the thick trunks of the trees, and putting it up to shelter themselves.

The two gentlemen had about one-third of the distance still to accomplish, when a pack of dogs, that looked more like living skeletons than anything else, rushed at them from the bushes, barking furiously, and filling the forest with their wolf-like howls. These dogs belonged to the blacks; and it would certainly have been impossible to have brought together in any part of the world a more motley set of worthless, half-starved, mangy, bare-boned curs. It was a problem how they could live at all; the blacks scarcely found food enough for themselves and their families in the forest. Kangaroos began to be extremely scarce in this part of the bush; and if the half-starved animals did not now and then succeed in surprising a dingo or a wild dog, the very skin, and coat of which they demolished, they would have had no other resource but to do as their masters did in time of need—that is, to single out one from among their fellows, and kill and devour him.

The dogs are useful to the blacks, inasmuch as they assist them in hunting the opossum, the wallaby, and sometimes a kangaroo, of which they may, *perhaps*, get the entrails. When this fails, they have, like their masters, to dig their food out of the ground, and make a repast upon worms and grubs, or live on air.

Mr. Powell and his companion stood still, and each seized a stick, to defend themselves against any attack from these animals, while the former looked round for his own dogs. George, who had again ridden down the river, had taken them with him. The blacks quickly perceived their white visitors; besides, they knew the master of the station, and suddenly, as if rising out of the ground, five or six young lads appeared in the midst of the dogs, throwing at them their boomerangs, or pieces of wood they snatched up, with such success, that the howling troop scattered in all directions,

with their tails between their legs, leaving the passage free for the white men.

Although the blacks had been but a very short time in their present station, their camp was already put up. The men had torn the bark off the nearest gum-trees in large sheets, by the aid of the small hatchets with which some of them were provided. The women dragged these sheets of bark to the place selected, put three or four of them on the windward side, in such a manner that they terminated in a point. Against this point, somewhat inclined, a pole of about seven in length was fixed, in an oblique direction, so as to form a sort of roof, and camp, bed, and house were completed.

These sheets of bark, it is true, only protected the occupants against the inroads of wind and weather upon one side, and the burning rays of the mid-day sun. The bare earth, seldom covered even with an opossum cloak, served as bed.

But little did the hardy children of these desolate gum-forests, accustomed as they are to face wind and weather, care about this. So that they had wherewith to fill their bellies, of whatever nature the food might be, they were satisfied, and troubled themselves little about the rest.

As soon as they had driven their dogs away from the owner of the station, they took no further notice of him. They had been allowed to pitch their camp here, and the rest followed as a matter of course. Moreover, they had still plenty to do to put their night quarters in order; and as soon as the sheets of bark were duly arranged, fires were lighted before each separate gunyo, apparently for the purpose of preparing their meals, although with the exception of a wallaby and two opossums, no provisions were to be seen.

The Australian forest or "bush" is a melancholy home for the black, and furnishes him with little besides firewood and bark to protect himself against the inclemency of the weather. It scarcely produces any wild fruits. The few productions which, in shape or color, resemble fruit, are not fit to eat; for they are either as hard as wood, and quite as dry, or wholly insipid. To the first sort belongs the Australian pear; to the second the raspberry. The Australian cherry, which has its stone outside, at the upper extremity, is also a small, insipid, and entirely worthless berry. This last completely exhausts the bush fruits of the southern half of Australia. The natives are naturally reduced to make up in the world of insects what the forest denies them in fruit, and larvae and beetles, worms, grubs and caterpillars are never safe against their hunger. A species of acacia furnishes them also with a nutritious resin, which is chiefly gathered by the women, who carry it with them in nets. In addition to this, their chief staple of food consists of a species of ice-plant, furnished with small triangular and fleshy leaves, something like a file, and it preserves its sappy stalk even during the season of great drought. Here and there, in marshy places, other roots, and cabbage-like plants are found, which come in their way, and the gum-trees would be much barer, and present a more desolate appearance, if their leaves were not protected by a sharp, oily taste from the voracity of either man or brute.

These gunyoes, or tents of bark, were apparently erected under the trees without any regard to order. Their roofs all pointed in the direction from which the wind blew. Only one seemed to be raised more carefully than the rest. Its roof was somewhat lower, quite circular, with a small opening in front. This gunyo was separated from the others, and the dogs seemed to stand in special awe of it, describing a wide circle when they passed near it.

In this gunyo lived one of the most remarkable beings to be found among the native tribes. He was a cripple, reduced to this state by a strange disease, peculiar to the Australian continent. The flesh of the arms and legs—usually of one arm or one leg—disappears from under the skin, giving the diseased limb the appearance of a skeleton covered with india-rubber. This disease might be called a negative elephantiasis, so opposite are its effects, yet so singular its causes.

The latter is prevalent among the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands, the origin of both being ascribed to lying upon the damp ground. It is, however, strange that the same cause should produce such different results

in two countries not far distant from each other, or at least washed by the same sea; in the one, a swelling of the legs and arms to the thickness of the body, whereby the skin is stretched like that of a drum; in the other the entire disappearance of the flesh, accompanied with a drying up of the muscles and sinews, while the shrunken skin closely and firmly adheres to the bones.

The blacks attribute this to supernatural agencies, and to evil spirits, prowling about in the silence of the night, and with greedy lips sucking the blood of the unfortunate whose fire has gone out. If but one limb, either arm or leg, is attacked, as is usually the case, the patient on whom the evil spirit is supposed to exercise his power, goes through life pretty smoothly, and does not seem to care any more about the accident than his neighbor of the South Sea of legs swollen almost to bursting.

But the black belonging to this tribe was visited more severely than common, and had been deprived by the evil spirit of the use of both his legs. He could neither walk nor stand. Although the upper part of his body, as far as the hip-bone was perfectly sound, and even seemed to be strong and powerful; with a broad, arched chest, and muscular arms, his legs were shrunken like those of a skeleton. He was forced to move upon his hands, which he did without much apparent difficulty, placing his legs crosswise over each other. During long marches, his tribe assisted him by carrying him, when the ground permitted, on a sheet of bark, which, being drawn by the woman, considerably aided his progress.

Cripples, especially the blind, do not by any means stand in high estimation among the blacks. This indeed is sufficiently shown by the whole tenor of their political life, in consequence of which the oldest and *strongest* men are selected for chieftains and rulers, while the others are required to pay them unconditional obedience. In the case of this unfortunate man, however, who even seemed deprived of the power of providing his subsistence, circumstances were greatly different; the tribe not only showed him the utmost consideration and attention, but almost considered him as a being of a higher sort—at least, as one who stood in close relationship with the spirits.

He certainly possessed uncommon abilities. His tribe came but rarely in contact with white men, yet he had learned enough of their language to speak it well, and even fluently. Whether for this reason, or on account of his intercourse with the spirits of the night, with whom, according to the natives, he was in constant communion, and whose will he made known to his tribe, he had received the name of *Nguyulloman*—i. e. *the interpreter*; with the title of honor, *Burka, the old man*. No booty was brought to the camp, no fat kangaroo, no plump opossum, no ball of resin, or net of snow-white grubs, of which he did not receive his share, as a tribute to which he was entitled—as a mark of deference and duty.

Nguyulloman seemed to receive these attentions as a matter of course, and even exacted respect from his tribe. They were not allowed to stir, when, at night, under his solitary roof of bark, his deep hollow voice was sometimes heard chanting his incantations in the darkness of the forest. Nothing but the noise of the howling of the dogs was then heard, except his voice. They feared the cripple, who, whenever they approached within reach of his hut, threw stones and pieces of wood at them with unerring aim. Dismally did *Nguyulloman's* adjurations resound, as they mingled with the howl of the affrighted animals. The whole tribe would then await in anxious expectation the conclusion of his chant. No child durst cry; and only here and there some woman might be seen creeping timidly and carefully to the fire with wood, that the flame might not be extinguished. Should that happen, the dreadful *Nokunno*, who wanders about at night and attacks the unfortunates whose fires are extinguished, would have had them in his power.

Nguyulloman was sitting before his shed, on an opossum cloak spread for him, and attentively watching the operations of some children of the tribe who were busily engaged collecting dry wood and placing it within his reach, that he might feed his fire himself. After dark, no one dared approach him but unless summoned by him.

The two white men walked to this place, where some of the "burkas," or old men, as-

sembled as soon as they noticed their approach, and were now quite safe from the dogs.

"Well, *Nguyulloman*," said Mr. Powell, who knew the cripple well, and had shown him many a kindness, "you are here again, I see. How have you been all this long time?"

"Good, master," answered the black. His pronunciation was remarkably pure. Indeed, all the Australian natives excel in their nice perception of foreign sounds. In this respect they differ from the African negro. They pronounce the foreign words which they remember as purely and distinctly as if they had been brought up from their childhood in the country where the language is spoken. "A thousand good, but tribe is poor—has no more kangaroo, no more emu; white men have driven all away; and much war with Darling blacks; cruel blacks—have taken much butter. Poor Rufus blacks are badly off."

"But in the malley-bush there are still plenty of kangaroos, *Nguyulloman*; and in the Murray plenty of fish and lobsters. Opossums are to be found everywhere; and wild dogs, which you like so much, are, I am sorry to say, but too plentiful."

"Where are they?" answered the cripple, shrugging his shoulders. "Your large kangaroo dogs drive them far away into the bush. Black man cannot find them—lives on pig's face and worms, and suffers from hunger—a thousand hunger."

"Well," said Mr. Powell, in a kind tone, "*Nguyulloman* shall at least not suffer from hunger to-day. I have allowed you to encamp on the station; and I hope that, during the short time you are here, you will behave well. I know *Nguyulloman* can force his tribe to do so, for he has power over them."

A passing and scarcely perceptible smile stole over the cripple's features as, without raising his head, he looked at the white man from beneath his bushy eyebrows. At last he said, slowly:

"*Nguyulloman* shall not suffer hunger?"

"No, for I will tell my stock-keeper to mind that you receive three sheep, and as many dampers."

"Butcher!" said *Nguyulloman*, with evident satisfaction and sparkling eyes, shaking his head in a satisfied manner; "butcher! no spear shall be thrown by us at your cattle. My young men shall eat neither thy cattle nor thy horses. *Nguyulloman* is waiting for the dampers!"

M'Donald laughed.

"The old fellow speaks in a very decided manner," he said, "and seems to think of his comfort before anything else. Indeed, this half skeleton is a frightful sight. The upper part, man in full force and vigor—half a giant, to all appearance—and below a disgusting carcass, covered with skin. He appears just like a man peeping out of his grave!"

"His chest and arms are particularly powerful," replied Mr. Powell; "and it is easily accounted for by his having for so many years moved by their aid alone. Indeed, I never saw a more powerful or beautifully formed bust than his."

"Bless me! who is that?" cried M'Donald, as he cast his looks at the other natives, and perceived among them the form of a black, entirely naked, who stood at about ten paces from them, leaning on his long wooden spear, as if he were cut out of dark marble. He seemed to be about thirty years of age; his body was faultless; the structure of his limbs strong and well proportioned—his hand and foot even small and neat, while his eyes looked like two burning coals from under his silky, curly, raven hair. The most remarkable feature about him was his beard. It not only descended to his chest, but completely covered his neck, shoulders, and the upper part of his back. Thick as ivy grows upon a wall, this curly beard seemed to have crept over his shoulders, upon which it lay like a glossy cloak of fur. Such beards, although not extremely rare among the Australian blacks, are nevertheless not frequently met with in that State. They cover the whole of the neck and shoulders like a regular fur mantle, and give the wearer a peculiarly wild but picturesque appearance. Whether it was that the black was aware of the impression he had produced, he fastened his dark eye upon the strange white man, who, on his part, looked at him with astonishment.

"A fine specimen of an Australian black," said Mr. Powell, who had followed the look and outstretched arm of his guest; "and these two men—the one in his perfection, the other

in his infirmity—peculiar to this country, might be considered as excellent representatives of the tribes. A couple of these black Eves added to the group, would make it complete."

"Kakurru!" cried M'Donald, without answering, and in the language of the natives. "How is it you are here, among the Rufus black? Have you left the wild marshes of Encounter Bay, and made peace with your old foes?"

"Kakurru has seen the eyes of the white man, and heard his voice," replied the black, "but his face has become a stranger to him; it has changed like the moon."

"Hallo, Mr. M'Donald!" cried Mr. Powell, amazed, "where in the world did you learn the language of this black fellow so well? Why, you speak it as fluently as a native!"

"Partly from a long residence among them, and partly from a natural capacity for the acquirement of languages," said M'Donald, smiling. "After all, their language is not difficult; and, with a little attention, one can easily learn enough of it to make one's self understood. But our countrymen, I am sorry to say, give themselves very little trouble to acquire this knowledge; and the result is that the blacks, considered so far below us intellectually, almost always shame us, and learn much more of our language than we do of theirs."

"You are right, certainly; but what are we to do with their jargon? It is to the interest of the blacks to understand us; much more so, indeed, than it is ours to make ourselves acquainted with their language; they therefore, naturally enough, take the trouble. At any rate, they can learn more of us than we of them. But do you know this fellow?"

"Yes; I once fell in with him at Encounter Bay, and even rendered him a service, I think. But he does not seem to recognize me. Then, I wore no beard."

During this conversation, *Kakurru* had not taken his eyes off the stranger, who had addressed him in his own language, for a single moment; and even the other blacks looked at him with astonishment. He was the first white man they had heard speaking the language of one of their tribes fluently.

"Make a light, poor lubra, *ngarang damper*!" said a voice by their side. Looking to the place whence the sound proceeded, they saw one of the most horrible beings of these tribes—the greatest monstrosity of repulsive hideousness that human imagination could possibly fancy. This creature was a woman. Of what age, could not be ascertained; dirt and wrinkles disformed and concealed her features. Not the least bit of a garment concealed her nakedness; her hair hung entangled over the bony shoulders, and her bleared eyes gleamed as much with rage and hatred against the white as they besought compassion.

"This would be another specimen for your Australian menagerie," said M'Donald, turning away from the old woman with disgust.

"It is frightful, when we consider how deep man can sink; and what would our philosophers and orthodox persons say, if they had to class this picture of deformity among the lords of the creation?"

"Come away," said Mr. Powell, suddenly; "I shall get sick if I look any longer at this hideous object. One would scarcely believe it possible for a human creature to sink to such a state of complete degradation."

"I will give you something," said M'Donald, turning to the woman, to quiet her. Casting his eyes once more on the bearded black, who had remained motionless at his place, without taking his gaze off the white man, he returned with Mr. Powell toward the house.

They had scarcely taken a dozen paces, when *Kakurru*, with his spear in his right hand, slowly and carefully followed them. He kept his eye upon the tracks which the young man had left in the dry clay and sand, until he came to a place where they were imprinted clearly and distinctly. Here he stood still, stooped down a few minutes to examine them carefully, measured them with his hand, by laying his knuckles on them in a peculiar manner, and suddenly started up with a smile of triumph upon his features, and rushed after the white men whom he overtook in a few bounds. M'Donald hearing the steps behind him, turned round quickly. As he saw *Kakurru* he halted, and said to him with a smile:

"Well, my friend, what do you want?"

"Jack!" replied the black, stretching out his left hand toward him, "Jack—certainly!"

"Well, well," said M'Donald, as a slight

blush spread over his countenance, "it appears my beard has, after all, not concealed my face from you."

"Beard yes, but feet no," answered the black, smiling, as he pointed to the tracks. "When Kakarru has seen them once, he never forgets them."

"What does he say?" asked Mr. Powell, perplexed.

"He recognized me by my foot tracks," replied M'Donald. "One would scarcely deem it possible."

"Oh, yes!" replied Mr. Powell, it is astonishing how clever the blacks are at this; and, indeed, they sooner notice the tracks of a man than his features. But their continual wars render it absolutely necessary for them, when they find tracks, to be able to distinguish those of their friends from those of their foes. He seems to have a wish to speak to you."

"I shall see you soon, Kakarru," said M'Donald, without replying to Mr. Powell's observation, continuing his walk without taking any further notice of the black.

Meantime everything was astir in the camp of the natives. The women gathered wood, as if they were going to intrench themselves against the attack of a hostile tribe, while the men reclined upon the ground awaiting what was to come.

The sheep had been promised, and must come; and come they did, but not quite so comfortably as they had imagined. Half an hour might have elapsed, when Mr. Bale, the stock-keeper, rode up to their camp, and in a frightful jargon of English and Australian, claiming no relationship whatever to any language, requested half a dozen men to go with him to the house to receive the destined presents. Some of the blacks seemed inclined to send the women, as they considered such occupation beneath their dignity. But Nguyuloman decided the case. He was hungry, and was afraid the women would be too long about it. He therefore ordered three of the young men and four women to do Mr. Bale's bidding, and to bring the promised provisions to the camp as soon as possible. This was done after a short delay. The young men returned in ten minutes, with wild and triumphant bounds, each carrying a sheep upon his shoulders. The women followed, somewhat more slowly, with the dampers; and they at once slaughtered the animals, in which proceeding they showed great skill.

In the first place, Nguyuloman received all the kidneys. He threw them upon the charcoal, and devoured them, with half a damper, before the rest had done skinning and cutting up the animals. This first meal did not prevent him dispatching, afterward, twice as much meat as any of the rest.

It is astonishing what quantities of food a black will manage to swallow at one sitting; you can actually see their bellies swelling like well-filled sacks. But afterward they will fast just as long, and, to keep the rebellious stomach in order, they tighten their hempen or bast rope, which they frequently wear about their bare bodies, thus making it serve as a hunger belt. The meat and the rest of the provisions were divided by the "burkas," or old men, into shares for the different classes, according to age and sex. No nation on the face of the earth possesses so many and such strict laws on this subject as the natives of every part of Australia.

Certain articles of food, certain parts of animals or fish, are only eaten by particular members of the community, and are forbidden to the rest, varied reasons being assigned for this strange custom. Transgressors of these rules are supposed to grow weak and old before their time; their muscles and sinews are said to lose their strength, and they are exposed to attacks of mortal disease. Age generally forms the boundary line, but not always. There is this characteristic, that the "burkas," or chiefs, who made these laws, are alone allowed to eat of everything: and have, of course, reserved for themselves the best pieces. These laws are very strictly enforced, and, for the most part, by means of superstitious threats.

When all was settled, and the meat ready, these reckless children of the wilderness gave themselves up to the enjoyment of the meal as greedily as if a similar repast had been promised them every day. They troubled themselves very little for the morrow, allowing each day to take care of itself.

The dogs also regaled themselves, probably

the first opportunity for so doing that had presented itself for a long time. They then threw themselves down on their backs by the fires. Nguyuloman had already set the example, and toward evening nothing was visible, but the dark forms of the women, heaping up wood near the gunyoes, to keep the fires alight during the night.

"We shall have time," said Mr. Powell, to M'Donald, after dinner, "to take a short ride before the evening sets in. I wish to go over to my next sheep station, in order to settle some small matters. If you will accompany me, we can take the dogs, and may perhaps start a dingo on our return."

"With all my heart; but I am afraid my horse is rather tired to-day."

"Oh, he must have rest, of course. There are plenty of horses in the paddock and you can ride one of mine. You will, at the same time, see more of the bush in this part, and I can also show you a fine flock of sheep."

"When do we start?"

"At once. I felt pretty certain of your assent to the proposal, and ordered the horses to be got ready before dinner. My man is waiting for us with the animals."

The friends went to the spot at which the horses stood impatiently champing their bits, and quickly vaulted into the saddle. Mr. Powell summoned his dogs by a shrill whistle, and a few minutes afterward they were riding at full speed toward the pathless bush, followed by their barking and yelling dogs.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BUSH.

THE newly-arrived immigrant in the United States of North America is frequently tantalized with the "Far West," which he seeks to reach by railway, steamer, or on horseback, still following the sun. The further west he goes, the more the "Far West" seems to retire before him; and this is the case even in the endless forests west of the Mississippi. In the marshes, where no trace is seen but that of the hunter and the game he is pursuing, he still says he is going to the West, because bears are getting scarce, and buffaloes may be classed among the natural curiosities of the locality.

Exactly the same kind of thing happens to the newly arrived stranger in the Australian bush, although he need not go so far in search of it. The inhabitants of Sydney, or of one of the other seaports, are apt to denominate whatever is situated beyond the precincts of their townships as *bush*. But the traveler soon discovers, as he journeys onward, that it lies further off; and at the stations in the wildest parts of the interior, the squatters do not consider whatever is within the precincts of their fences or roads—that is to say, cart-tracks—to be bush. Beyond that boundary, at least, they cannot deny that it exists. There, indeed, commences that dreary solitude of sand and malley-bushes, prickly grass, and salt bush, and whatever may be the names of the monstrosities of Australian vegetation.

Vast, fearfully vast and endless distances stretch out in hills and plains; but without the pleasant and definite character usually imparted to a country by undulating scenery. Not a drop of water flows through these wastes; no clear brook bubbles along the valleys, offering to the hunter or wanderer a fixed and definite course which he can follow as a guide out of these wastes. As the waves of the sea, to which the word of the Almighty has assigned their place, spread out in all directions, so, for hundreds of miles, do the malley-bushes extend over desert salt tracts, upon which even the native blacks dare not venture.

Heat, and a fine, salt, sandy dust, threaten to deprive the traveler of his sight; and no water is to be found to save the exhausted wanderer from a miserable death. With camels it might, perhaps, be possible to penetrate for some distance into this desert; but, under existing circumstances, the attempt would be useless, and such experiments have already led to the sacrifice of many lives. If some habitable oasis does exist in the interior, it could scarcely be turned to any account, even if once reached. It must certainly be unfit for cultivation. The hot wind which blows from the interior is sufficient to burn up all vegetation of the distant colonies, over which it passes with its withering breath; and much less could its process go on under its influence, in spite of any amount of labor or any sacrifice.

The want of water is another evil. Even in

the wooded and mountainous parts of Australia, in the Blue Mountains, and other excellent woodlands, water is scarce. That obtained from most of the wells dug by the hand of man has a salt taste. Can there be any ground to hope that it would be better in those deserts of salt and sand, where any one does not even meet with the bed of a river, which might be received as an indication that a source once sent its waters from those solitudes of the sea?

The Australian settlers, therefore, establish their stations in the malley-bush, always keeping in the neighborhood of the Murray river, to provide against the scarcity of water. They drive their flocks into the malley-bushes in search of grass, which grows there very thinly, it is true, but sweet—the wild oats, and particularly the salt-bush, which flourishes in the plains, and suits the sheep so well.

The shepherd's hut was situated in the bush, near a small creek, in which water collected during the rainy season, but the bed of which was empty, and exhibited the dry and cracked clay soil. The hut was a plain structure, raised on the trunks of young firs, the walls and roofs being formed of broad sheets of gum-bark. It was scarcely provided with more comforts than the gunyo of the black. In the corner stood a bed of sheep-skins, over which an opossum cloak was thrown. The kitchen utensils consisted of a few tin-pots and one iron pan. Some articles of wearing apparel, and a gun hung on some pegs fixed to the posts, indicated that this was a dwelling-place belonging to white men.

In the front of the hut, in the shade of a fine malley-fir—probably left for this purpose—a man reclined; it was the so-called "hut-keeper," a personage subordinate to the shepherd, whose duty it is to watch during the night over the sheep in the yard, and who, in the daytime, has nothing to do but prepare the simple morning and evening meals. This man seemed to be one of the worst specimens of the lower class of white men in Australia. He was filthy and ragged; his old hat of cabbage-palm looked as though it had been used more than once as a pillow: it was completely crushed, and fragments of it hung down over his forehead. His hands and feet betrayed but too plainly the scarcity of water in these regions, in which all the drinking water for the men had to be brought from the chief station; of course, to waste any in washing operations was out of the question. With his head propped upon his left hand, he was reading, strangely enough, in a small well-thumbed book lying open before him. So deeply absorbed did he seem to be by its contents, that he did not hear the noise of the approaching horses until his dog, sunning himself by his side, and looking just as lazy as his master, raised his head slowly and gave a low growl.

At this moment Mr. Powell and his companion came up to the open space before the hut, dismounted, and fastened their horses to the branches of a malley-bush.

The hut-keeper rose quickly on recognizing his master, while his dog, a wretched mongrel cur, retreated, whining, at the approach of the mighty, big-boned kangaroo dogs, and sought protection under the feet of the only man likely to afford it.

"Well, Miller, how are you?" said Mr. Powell, walking slowly up to the man. "Where is Hendricks with the sheep?"

"On the other side of the fir-creek, sir, near the dry marsh. He thought the grass was better there."

"Then we passed him, and shall find him on our return. Nothing happened here? Lost no sheep?"

"No, sir."

"No lambs yet?"

"They are just beginning to come, but the grass looks very bad. It would be a good thing if we could get some rain."

During this conversation, M'Donald approached the place where the man had been reposing, and took up the book, out of mere curiosity, to see what kind of reading a man of this sort would choose. He had, however, scarcely cast a glance at it, when he called out, in the greatest astonishment:

"Homer, by all that's good, and in the original!"

"Does he read Homer? Indeed!" said Mr. Powell. "A divine shepherd, I suppose?"

At this discovery Miller's face was suffused with a deep blush; it could not be that he felt ashamed at being caught reading such a work;

it must have been that his degraded position was rendered more apparent by this fact.

"Time hangs so very heavily in the bush," he stammered, in evident embarrassment, but immediately after bit his lips at having uttered the excuse. M'Donald could not help examining him more attentively, and soon perceived, in spite of the filth and rags which covered him, that the wretched being before him had once seen better times, and that those hands had no doubt been accustomed to a very different kind of work from that of preparing food for the shepherd and placing burdens for the sheep. On his left hand he still wore a ring, the pure gold of which neither dust nor dirt had been able entirely to conceal.

Mr. Powell had in the meantime gone to examine the hurdles, placed at about four hundred paces distant, and to see whether they were in good order. M'Donald was unable to take off his eyes from the shy and almost crouching form of the man standing before him. It almost seemed to him as if he must have seen those gray and dull eyes before—as if that voice were familiar to him. But where? His eventful life had led him through the bush in every direction, and brought him into contact with many individuals. How could he keep the features of all of them in his memory? Then the man before him looked so brutalized; the shell which covered him had become so coarse that it was very possible he might have met him before under better circumstances, and could not now recognize him.

He felt, however, that his fixed gaze was disagreeable to the man, who turned away his eyes with evident uneasiness and even irritation.

"What countryman are you?" asked M'Donald, in a friendly tone.

"A German."

"I thought so—and your name?"

"Miller," (with some hesitation.)

"From what part?" continued M'Donald, in English, as if not noticing the German he heard from the mouth of the stranger.

"Wirttemberg."

"From Wirttemberg? You were not a shepherd in your own country?"

A wild—almost mocking—smile stole over Miller's features, and he seemed as if about to give a hasty and angry answer. Were such the case, he altered his mind, and, after a moment's reflection, slowly and hesitatingly replied:

"No!"

"Come, my dear friend," said Mr. Powell, returning from his examination; "we must not stay long. If we wish to call at the 'dry mash,' we have not a moment to lose; and I wish particularly to speak to the shepherd this evening. Take good care of the sheep, Miller," he added, addressing the German while mounting his horse; "there is a tribe of blacks encamped near the station, and you may be sure that some of them are in the neighborhood. Have you no dog but that cur?"

"Hendricks has one—Pollo."

"Well, that's a better animal. Good-day."

M'Donald, who was already in the saddle, nodded in a friendly way to the German, and the two horsemen soon left the bush behind them, and cantered through the open part of the forest.

"What a strange man that hut-keeper of yours is," said M'Donald, when the ground again allowed him to ride by the side of his companion; "neglected, and sunk in the lowest state of degradation, the fellow, in all his misery, is reading Homer. Might one not suppose that the man who feels such a want would also do something to preserve respectability in his outward appearance?"

"My dear friend," answered Mr. Powell, at the same time carefully avoiding the sharp points of the prickly grass, very plentiful where they were riding, "perhaps no place in the world exhibits such strange instances of degeneration and complete upsetting of all human relations as the bush in Australia. Indeed, it sometimes appears to me as if Providence had meant clearly to show us that it was not nature alone in Australia that delights in paradoxes, but even humanity itself. Something similar exists in America, but not to such a degree as in Australia; for there people do not sink into the lowest state of human society, and become hut-keepers to a lazy shepherd. This occupation is the last refuge of all those wretched beings, who, in their old homes, considered Australia as the land in which they had only to buy half a dozen sheep in order to be-

come rich in the space of a few years. Every grade of society, every profession, almost every rank in Europe, have their representatives in the bark huts of the bush."

"It must be a frightful life," said M'Donald, with a sigh; "and, nevertheless—"

"After a time, many of them desire nothing better," said Mr. Powell, interrupting him. "This German, for instance, who is even said to have, somewhere about Australia, a family, rendered miserable by his faults, was formerly book-keeper at another station, and had gradually saved a hundred pounds, with which he intended, as he said, returning home. But he is addicted to drink, and this unhappy vice has spoiled all. He spent what he had, sunk lower than the brute, and at last I took him as hut-keeper, more out of pity than for any use he can be to me. He is too lazy and careless even for this occupation; and I shall be glad to get rid of him again. When he came here first he looked decent, but now he is entirely lost in filth and idleness. His hair hangs over his face; his beard grows as long as it chooses; indeed, I scarcely recognized him to-day."

"But how is that? The Germans are generally said to be good shepherds."

"Very possible; perhaps at home, when brought up to it; but not here in Australia, where, indeed, we get little but the scum of all parts of the world. It is strange, too, that the Germans seldom occupy themselves with the rearing of sheep and cattle, and rarely stay in the bush, unless compelled to do so."

He suddenly reined in his horse, which obeyed the least motion of the bridle, turned round, and rode back to a place where something extraordinary seemed to attract his attention.

"Those blacks have been here in the bush," said M'Donald, who had also turned round; "I noticed the tracks before."

"These rascally fellows are snaking about," said Mr. Powell, "watching for an opportunity to make off with some sheep."

"Do you think you have anything to fear from them as long as this tribe is encamped near the station?" asked M'Donald.

"That will not deter them in the least," replied the settler, who, with knit eyebrows, was examining the track of a bare foot deeply imprinted into the sand.

"Of course, the tribe I favor will not steal anything, or, at least, not so long as I provide for them; but I am sure there are others in the neighborhood, and I should not be in the least degree surprised if our friends by the river sent them word where they will have the best chance of success. But I hear the bells of the sheep, and here is the man I am in search of. You will find him a genuine specimen of the Australian shepherd—a convict, with a 'pass,' or 'ticket-of-leave,' living in comfortable lodgings, and who has at last found the aim of his whole life. Hendricks is a real specimen of the whole class."

From the place where they stopped, on the summit of a small, thinly-wooded sand-hill, they could see, at a distance of about six hundred paces, a man stretched out under one of the solitary firs. When he heard the noise of the approaching horsemen, he merely turned his head in the direction, without, however, pausing in his occupation at the sight of his master. He was engaged in nothing less than playing upon a rusty old jew's-harp; his dog, a fine black boar-hound, reclined not far off, on the summit of a sand-hill, whence he could watch the whole flock.

"Well, Hendricks," said Mr. Powell, when they had ridden up to him, and after watching him for a few moments with a smile, "you take it coolly."

"The best way in the world, sir," replied he, removing the instrument from his mouth, wiping it, and putting it into his pocket; "and a very happy fellow is he who can do so."

"The wagons have come, Hendricks."

"The d—l!" he exclaimed, becoming suddenly animated, and jumping up—"any tobacco?"

"Of course. How are the sheep getting on—any signs of disease yet?"

"None—all as sound as butter."

"Indeed! and the lambs?"

"Too early for them yet: the few that dropped died. Shall we get the rations to-morrow?"

"Yes, as early as possible: and keep an eye about you—we've tracked blacks in the neighborhood. A small troop are also encamped at the station."

"Be d—d take them!" growled Hendricks.

"Look after your hut-keeper a little; I really believe the fellow sleeps as well at night as in the daytime."

"I think so, too," said the shepherd, laughing; "but that is his business. If I have my hands full of work during the day, I cannot be expected to watch him at night."

M'Donald laughed, and Mr. Powell, turning his horse away, said to him:

"Give the man who brings the rations to-morrow twelve of your best sheep; and if there is the least appearance of disease, send Miller at once to the station to let me know. You understand?"

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the shepherd, sulkily; "but don't forget to send me some tobacco. I'll be hanged if I have not been chewing all my pockets, and I have not a single place where I shall be able to take care of it."

"I will be sure to think of it—but I wish you would drop your swearing."

"Ay, ay, sir; but what did I want to ask—oh, have you any new jew's-harps?"

"I ordered them," replied Mr. Powell, laughing; "but I have not examined the things yet, and therefore do not know whether they have arrived; but I am almost sure they are there."

"Then I shall go over to-morrow evening myself and choose a few," said the man evidently satisfied, and smiling complacently.

"Why, I think yours is still in very good order," said M'Donald.

"If you like, I will send you a few to-morrow morning," said Mr. Powell.

"No, thank you," answered Hendricks; "I must examine them myself. I want a few new ones, to play different tunes. I know all these."

"If that is the case," said Mr. Powell, laughing, "you certainly must go yourself. But I am afraid you will not find what you want."

"That would be disagreeable," growled the shepherd.

"Well, good-by. Keep an eye on the blacks and Miller, and look carefully after the sheep!" With these words, Mr. Powell gave his horse the spur, and proceeded homeward, followed by M'Donald.

"Keep my eyes everywhere," growled Hendricks, looking sulkily after the two horsemen, "for 25*l.* a year, and no tobacco. I should like to know who that new cove is;—a new overseer, perhaps?—wouldn't be amiss. But what do I care?" he added, after a short pause, fixing his hat more firmly upon his head and taking his cloak from the ground, "there will be fresh tobacco to-morrow, and now I am going in. The beasts must have got their bellyful by this time, or at least they will not die of hunger until to-morrow morning. Here, Pollo!—home!"

This was sufficient for the dog. The sagacious animal knew very well what it had to do. Barking loudly, he collected the sheep from their various retreats into the nearest open space, until he had gathered the whole flock, and then drove it past his master, in the direction of the hut. Hendricks stood still until they had all gone by, and was on the point of following, when he observed a ewe which had just lambed, and was staying behind with its helpless offspring.

"Pollo!" cried Hendricks, pointing at the poor animal with his crook: "there!—Does not the beast know what to do?"

The dog ran toward the sheep, and barked at it once or twice. However unmercifully he might attack stragglers from the flock, the faithful animal now showed himself just as considerate, and looked from the lamb, scarcely able to stand, to his master, as if he wished to say:—"Surely, you must have a little patience; I cannot drive the mother away from her young."

Hendricks seemed to be of a different opinion. The flock was already in motion, and he was impatient of delay. Uttering a tremendous oath, cursing sheep, dog, and everything else, he stepped toward the poor anxious ewe, which, as if suspicious of danger, looked up to him with fear, and stood between him and the lamb: he pushed it aside and with a kick, accompanied by a blasphemous oath, destroyed this young life. The ewe hastened to the spot, bleating piteously, but the lamb was dead. While the mother bewailed the loss of her little one, Hendricks set the dog at her. Perhaps Pollo did not obey willingly, for, of the two, he undoubtedly had most feeling. But the lamb was dead: the shepherd was striking at the bleating ewe with his stick, and thus be-

tween them they drove the poor animal after the rest.

Had Mr. Powell witnessed the scene, Hendricks would, no doubt, have been dismissed at once. The latter, however, knew that he incurred no risk of detection. Before an hour could elapse, the wild dogs, which are always hovering about flocks and herds would have found the lamb, and devoured it. Was it worth the trouble of staying in the bush half-an-hour longer for the sake of a single lamb?

When the two horsemen quitted the German, the latter followed them with fixed eyes, until the last sound of the hoofs had ceased; then he went into his hut, threw himself down upon the ground, buried his face in his hands, and remained in that posture for half-an-hour. Not a motion of his body betrayed that he was still alive.

"Hallo—dead!" suddenly exclaimed a rough and strange voice; at the same time the end of a thick and heavy bush-boot came in contact with the German's side, who raised his head in astonishment, and jumped upon his feet.

"Well, plenty of life yet, I see," said the new-comer, laughing, "to become very dangerous to half a leg of mutton, and three or four quarts of tea. How are you, old cove? who are these two men who have just been passing on horseback?"

"Who are you, if I may ask?" the German said, instead of replying to the questions of the new-comer, whom he examined with a scrutinizing glance. Indeed, his appearance fully justified this precaution. Although people in the bush made but small pretensions to anything like neatness of exterior, this intruder did not even seem to be a common bundleman. He looked much more like a highwayman, than one coming to the station to seek honest occupation.

His head was bare, and his long, matted, dark-red hair was bound Indian-fashion, with a band of bast. His beard, of the same color as his hair, had not felt the razor for months. The upper part of his body was covered with a tattered opossum cloak, and on his back he carried just such another garment, carefully rolled up, and apparently a new one. His legs were incased in a pair of old torn trowsers, terminating in fringes, the result of long wear and contact with the thorns. His unstockinged feet were, however, slipped into a pair of strong and new boots. Slung over his shoulder, he carried a net, like those used by the blacks to carry the resin of the accacia, or other delicacies; and it contained a copper powder-flask, a leathern bag and a small parcel. In his right hand he grasped a handsome, double-barreled gun, as much in contrast with his old worn-out clothes as a pair of epaulettes would be upon the shoulders of a beggar.

"Where do I come from, mate?" exclaimed the intruder, with a laugh, leaning with his left arm upon his gun; "why, from the bush, as you can see, and I am looking out for the nearest head-station, to obtain employment. Any chance here?"

"Cannot tell," Miller answered, dryly.

"But who were those two swells on horseback?" continued the stranger, looking abstractedly at the tracks left by the hoofs in the soft ground.

"One of them is the master of the station, the other a stranger, whom I do not even know myself."

"Hem! Up or down?"

"You mean the river?"

"Yes."

"I don't know and don't much care."

"You are not an Englishman?"

"No—a German."

"And—have not been long in the country?"

"About six years."

"Hem! Where is the shepherd?"

"Out; but he will soon be back with the sheep. You have a gun there?"

"Yes, pretty fair; it seldom misses its aim, and when one is alone in the bush, such a companion is very useful. Any blacks near?"

"Some arrived at the station to-day; at least, so Mr. Powell said."

"There are tracks all over the bush. Not felt any thing of them yet?"

"Not yet. Put down your bundle; you won't go any further to-day?"

"Thanks. I should not like to fall into the hands of those black rascals after dark."

The stranger took off his opossum cloak, placed his gun in a corner, close to the place where the German had been reposing, and while the latter went into the other hut to get

some tea ready, he threw himself upon the bed. Catching sight of the book, he took it up, but immediately threw it away again with contempt, stretched himself at full length, and made himself as comfortable, and seemed as much at home as if he had been owner of the place. At least, such was the case before the gold discoveries, which have so increased the cost of the necessities of life as to prevent the majority from practicing hospitality as before. Certain provisions used to be added to the rations of the men for that purpose; and the traveler, whether afoot or on horseback, who managed to reach a human habitation at evening, had no occasion to ask whether he might spend the night there; this followed as a matter of course. Whenever these shepherds or hut-keepers, even if they belonged to the lowest class of human society—and to some curses were as familiar as household words—saw a stranger in the distance, they immediately put the tin quart pot of tea to the fire, took the damper from the shelf, and cut off a steak or chop for his supper. Nothing could have given them greater offense than to offer money on leaving.

The stranger knew this. He reposed for some time with that expression of pleasure upon his face which one feels on being able to rest after long exertion. It never entered his head to offer to assist his host in preparing the simple meal; that was his business; as for himself, all he could be justly called upon to do was to dispatch it.

When the tea was ready, and the steak done, Miller called his guest, who at once commenced operations. While engaged in his meal he spoke but little. The German sat upon the shepherd's bed and watched him with curious looks. As soon as his hunger was satisfied—he ate as if he had not tasted food for the last week—he began to question his host respecting the topographical position of the place, and the distances to the different stations. Having obtained all the information on this subject which he wanted, he inquired into the circumstances of the master of the station—the different people he employed—his domestic life. At the same time, he seemed to be not a little interested in the proceedings of the police of the bush. The police-stations extended as far as the Murray, although at considerable distances from each other, and the black police, which had been organized but a short time, had already shown the usefulness of the institution by many an extraordinary capture, and the discovery of many a murder and theft. The stranger inquired most particularly about the police, but was at last obliged to relinquish all hope of obtaining definite information on this subject. The hut-keeper was not the right source from which he could draw the intelligence he was in search of.

When he had finished his meal, he stretched himself before the hut, and in a comfortable posture awaited the return of the shepherd; nor did he stir from the place until the sound of the bells and the barking of the dog announced the arrival of the flock.

From this moment Miller's duties commenced. Without taking any further notice of his guest, he went to meet the flock and drive it into the yard. Here he remained during the night in a small gunyo of bark, and was answerable for the safety of the flock until morning. If any sheep were lost during the night through his negligence, the value was deducted from his wages, about 20*l.* a year. If the shepherd lost any during the day, he had to pay.

When the sheep had been counted, and the shepherd had seen them driven safely into the yard, he sauntered slowly toward the hut. He halted when he caught sight of the new arrival, of whose coming he had already gained intelligence from the hut-keeper. He scrutinized him most attentively; and even his dog seemed to assist him in the examination. He crept slowly up to the man, who was still in a recumbent position, advanced sniffing, and, with tail between his legs and hair erect on the back, uttered a low and plaintive howl.

"Hallo!" cried the stranger, jumping up quickly, and casting a savage look at the dog, "what is that cursed animal howling about?"

"Good-evening, mate," said the shepherd, without giving a direct answer, and at the same time examining with an experienced glance the outward appearance of his guest, and the gun standing near him—"had a good sleep?"

"Good-evening!" replied the guest, scanning

the shepherd's countenance. "Ah, old fellow! I think we have seen each other before."

"Very possible, old cove," answered the shepherd, with a laugh, raising his sunburnt face, which bore a deep scar over the forehead. "We see a good deal of the country, look you; and, as I bear this precious mark upon my phiz, I am as easily recognized as the sign of a public."

"Rather inconvenient, isn't it?" the guest asked, trustfully.

"Sometimes it is, I confess," replied the shepherd; "but it has its advantages. This scratch has, perhaps, saved me from a few yards of rope."

"As a moral constraint?" said the guest, with a laugh: "but have you forgotten—Red John?"

"The devil!" exclaimed the shepherd, in a half-suppressed voice, glancing at the spot where he knew the hut-keeper to be. "What the devil brings you here? Has Jack given you leave of absence?"

"Yes, until he can catch me again," replied the other, to himself, in a suppressed tone. "But am I safe here? or is there any work in prospect?"

"No chance of occupation; but you are safe, at least for a day or two. The governor has just been here, and he told me of the arrival of the wagons from Adelaide. The man with the rations will very likely be here to-morrow, but you can easily keep out of the way."

"What blockhead is that you have with you?" inquired the stranger, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder toward the German, then just returning to the hut. "None of the old sort?"

"Bless you, no," replied the shepherd; "but we have nothing to fear from him. He doesn't see further than his nose. But—the dog howled so suspiciously at you. The last time he did so was when he caught scent of a black who had murdered a white man by the Murray, and still bore the traces of the blood on his person. I hope you have not—"

"Nonsense," replied the new-comer. "Who knows what the animal wants?"

"And that gun?"

"Is a present from a settler for saving his life?"

"For not shooting him through the window, I suppose?" said the shepherd, with a laugh.

"There are many ways of obliging people," answered the other, with a sort of a growl. "But do not bother me with these nonsensical questions. On what footing do you stand with the police?"

"Excellent, be d—d to them!" was the satisfactory answer. "For the last three years I haven't seen a policeman, and hope I shall not have the pleasure for as many more; unless," he added, slowly and thoughtfully, "they should come into this country on some fresh track."

"Yes; if a fellow is blockhead enough to leave tracks behind him," the guest remarked, with a grim smile. "But, I say, who was the stranger that accompanied your master to the station?"

"Don't know: although I fancied that I had seen his face before, yet I can't recollect where. It doesn't much matter," he added, laughing; "when people have such a large circle of acquaintances as you and I, we don't care about renewing the old ones."

"He does not belong to the police, I hope?"

"Bless you, no! He does not look like one; although it is difficult to tell, nowadays, in what disguises the rascals may not appear. What the devil have you to do with the police? Are they in pursuit of you?"

"Me? They don't think of such a thing; you know that I always hated these official vultures. I should never feel at my ease if I knew that one of them was near. Besides, they have now hit upon a new system with these cursed black rascals. Upon my word, the life of an honest fellow is not safe with them! To set the blacks against the whites! Parliament would not allow this, if legislators had but one spark of honor in their breasts!"

The shepherd laughed. Miller returned to prepare the evening meal, and the two old comrades turned their conversation from the police to indifferent topics, relating chiefly to the bush.

CHAPTER V.

THE DINGO HUNT.

WE left the two horsemen galloping back into the bush. For some time the prickly

grass, which has justly received its name from the porcupine, required all their attention. When they escaped from this, an extensive salt-bush plain opened before them; and as there was now not the least obstacle to impede the progress of their steeds, they went at a quicker pace.

The so-called "salt-bush," the greatest boon to the rearer of sheep, is found in most different forms: sometimes tolerably high and elongated; sometimes with round or angular leaves; sometimes resembling marjoram, sometimes anise. They are always full of sap and nutritious, with a taste of salt, more or less decided; and are invariably a favorite food of the sheep, which can do without water for a considerable time when feeding on the so-called "pig's-face."

From this point the country afforded the two horsemen a free and uninterrupted view of genuine Australian scenery. On their right and left, following the course of the river, stretched before their eyes the low, red sandy malley hills, scantily covered with thin grass. At rare intervals the slender, silvery trunks of the malley firs arose from amid the malley-bushes with their regular branches. The background, formed partly by that broad belt of lofty, gray, and characteristically called "never-greens"—gum-trees, which covered the valley of the Murray, rising occasionally on its banks to an enormous height. The eye found no spot on which it could rest with pleasure. The landscape looked like a rainy sky, gray upon gray, with its monotonous vegetation and soil, only fit for the pasturage of sheep and cattle.

Meanwhile, the dogs ran before the horsemen, sniffing with eagerness in all directions, and the haste with which they crossed from one side to the other clearly showed that they were upon various trails. Mr. Powell encouraged them, and suddenly, scarcely twenty paces before them, two dark brown wild dogs, the so-called "dingoes," rushed from a thick salt-bush, and set off through the brushwood in different directions.

"Tally-ho!" cried Mr. Powell, rising in his stirrups, with sportsman-like eagerness.

The shout resounded far over the plain, exciting the dogs, at first undecided in which direction to set off. This suspense, however, lasted only a few minutes, for some of the pack found the different trails, and immediately set off, half in one direction, and half in the other.

"Keep with your set, M'Donald," cried Mr. Powell, forgetting everything else in the eagerness of the chase; "see, the station lies yonder!"

Having said this, he put spurs to his horse, and followed the dogs.

M'Donald was too much of an Englishman to remain quiet at such a moment. Long acquainted with the bush, he entertained no fear of being lost; so he gave his horse the rein, and followed his game.

The dingo at first seemed inclined to make to the bush; but the fleet dogs were too close upon his heels, and cut off retreat in that direction. After doubling several times like a hare, vainly endeavoring to put the hounds to fault, he set off straight across the country, in the direction of the station. Perhaps he intended to swim the river or escape from his dangerous pursuers in the thick brushwood which covered its banks.

M'Donald rode an excellent animal. The dogs, now in full cry, had got a good start. Just as the hard-pressed dingo was doubling again, evidently making off toward the right, M'Donald took a short cut in that direction. He hoped by this maneuver to fall in with the hounds, and, if possible, to overtake them, or, at least, get in sight again. This scheme was at first materially facilitated by a small, open space, almost entirely free from bush, over which his horse bounded at a rapid rate. At the end a small malley hill impeded his progress, and with difficulty he made his way to the summit.

The moment that he succeeded in reaching the top, where the forest of bush became somewhat thinner, he listened for the sound of the dogs.

All at once he heard human voices not far from the place at which he was standing. His first movement was to lay his hands upon the pistols, which had providentially been put in the saddle, and he felt somewhat more at ease when he grasped them. He took one; it was loaded. Not hearing the dogs anywhere, he

turned his horse's head toward the direction in which the voices re-echoed, apparently in angry converse, and advanced over the sandy soil without making the slightest noise, until he came to a small thicket, the only separation between him and the speakers. He listened again, and thought he could distinguish the rough, angry tones of some native blacks.

M'Donald did not think it advisable to run into the hands of a troop of these men in the midst of the bush. At any rate, according to his calculation, he could not be far from the station, and the nearest belt of dark, lofty gum-trees must stand in the valley of the Murray. In spite of this, he did not know exactly how far he might be from the houses, and was in the act of turning aside into the sandy plain, in order to avoid meeting the blacks, when he suddenly heard the cry of a female voice, which froze the blood in his veins.

He stopped almost instinctively. The cry was repeated, and the next moment the bold horseman dashed into the midst of a troop of about eight or ten blacks, who started back with wild astonishment. Before him, stretching out her hands for help, stood Sarah, while two powerful blacks hastily snatched up their spears to resist his sudden attack.

"Oh, Mr. M'Donald!" cried the young lady, in an agony of terror, "help me—take me home!"

"Do not fear, Miss Sarah," said the young man, in a cheerful and encouraging tone; "I will answer for your safety with my life. Did you come here on foot?"

"My horse has been taken from me, and is grazing yonder in the bush."

M'Donald perceived that he had arrived just in time to rescue the poor girl from her unpleasant position, and perhaps save her from violence. He boldly turned to one of the biggest and fiercest-looking of the troop, saying to him, in his own language, "I say, old fellow, catch that horse yonder, and bring it here. Quick! Do you understand?"

The black looked astounded and aghast, little expecting to be addressed by a white man in his own tongue; but he stirred not, and only grasped the spear which he held in his hand the tighter.

"You, white man," he answered, "what do you want here? We have not called you. Go away, your place is not here."

M'Donald would gladly have jumped off his horse, placed Sarah upon it, and thus remove her out of danger as quickly as possible; but he knew well enough that by so doing he should have deprived himself of a great advantage over the blacks, who could then have thrown their spears at him and Miss Powell, and have quickly made their escape into the bush. Their attitude betrayed but too clearly that they had support close at hand. Probably, a strong tribe or troop of them, was encamped in the neighborhood, for these did not belong to the tribe at the station. Without, therefore, wasting another word upon them he drew out his pistol, cocked it, and pointed it at the breast of the black. The man at first made a movement, as if anxious to avoid the dangerous weapon, but still kept his ground.

"Now, hear me!" said the young stranger, quietly; "you know what I have in my hand. A pressure of my finger, and I send the short spear through your butter, and the 'murrang redlu' (wild dogs) shall gnaw thy bones. And this," continued he, partly drawing the second pistol, and letting it fall back into the holster, "is for the next rascal who offers to raise a spear. If, on my return, I do not find the horse, at the same place, we shall drive your whole tribe into the Murray, and make you food for the fishes. And now move, if you dare, black, cowardly rascals that you are, to attack a helpless woman!"

The blacks still paused, as if irresolute what to do, when M'Donald called out to the young lady not to lose a moment, to take hold of the stirrup-strap and walk by his side. Sarah did as he directed, and M'Donald quietly turned his horse's head toward the nearest open space. Pistol in hand, he carefully watched the movement of his enemies, and at last saw them crowd together, brandishing their spears eagerly, and speaking hastily to each other. He had now gained a hundred paces in advance; but he knew very well, that in an attack of the blacks, his companion would be exposed to the greatest danger.

"They are going to follow us," he hurriedly whispered to her: "but they have lost the

favorable moment. Give me your hand, Miss Sarah; place your foot upon mine—here, you can easily get up on these roots. Quick! they perceive our intention—quick, for God's sake, or it will be too late!"

Sarah was a genuine child of the forest, and perfectly at home in the saddle. Without the least hesitation she did as she was told—jumped upon the root, which they had now reached, placed her foot upon that of the horseman, and slung herself into the saddle. The blacks, emboldened by this attempted flight, rushed forward with a wild shout. The noble creature scarcely felt the spur ere it made the dust fly far behind, and bounded off with its burden with the rapidity of the wind. A few spears fell short of the fugitives, and M'Donald and his beautiful charge were soon beyond the reach of harm. Sarah pointed out the shortest way to the station, telling her preserver in hasty words how—perhaps a little thoughtlessly, but fearing no danger, as the black tribe was encamped close to the station—she had gone forth to meet *her father*, as she had often done before. Not venturing to ride further into the bush, she had stopped at a place whence she could command a view of the whole plain, when she was suddenly surrounded by the blacks, whose attitude became more threatening every minute, until he had rescued her from their grasp. M'Donald made no reply. He was about to beg of her never again to expose herself to such danger—to express his gratefulness to Providence for guiding him to her aid at the right moment—but he could not find words. Silently he supported the young girl, with his right arm round her waist, until all danger of being overtaken by the blacks was over and they could see the inclosures of the station. Then he stopped his horse, swung himself out of the saddle, which he gave up to the lady, put her left foot in the stirrup, and, leading the horse by the bridle, walked slowly at her side the rest of the way, until they arrived at the station.

"Hallo! M'Donald, where is your brush?" exclaimed Mr. Powell, who had arrived a short time before, triumphantly holding out the trophy taken from the dingo. "But," added he, "bless me! how did Sarah get upon your horse?"

"Father," said Sarah, "if Mr. M'Donald has missed his game it is not his fault, but mine. He met me at the right moment to save me, perhaps, from too severe a punishment for my thoughtlessness."

"I found Miss Sarah near the blacks," said M'Donald, with an imploring glance at the young lady, as if he wished to avoid the mention of the adventure, "and I offered her my escort."

"Blacks?" exclaimed Mr. Powell; "then the black rascals are in the neighborhood, after all."

"In the neighborhood of blacks," repeated Sarah, with surprise. "He saved me out of *their hands*!"

"Is it possible!" exclaimed her father, with fear and surprise; "did they dare—"

"Do not be uneasy on that account," said M'Donald, calmly. "A few impudent fellows, belonging to some wandering tribe, had, indeed, the audacity to stop Miss Powell; and when they thought we were far enough not to hurt us, hurled their spears after us. But the horse shall be in your possession again this very evening, or, at latest, by to-morrow morning. I will at once send one of the fellows encamped here to fetch it, and I feel perfectly certain he will regain it without difficulty."

Without waiting for an answer, he left Mr. Powell and his daughter and hastily walked to the spot where the blacks were encamped. Mr. Powell elicited from his daughter the details of her adventure, and he seemed inclined to assemble his men that very evening, and to chastise the blacks for their impertinence and audacity; it was so far advanced that this plan was abandoned, and he resolved to go out early in the morning in order to reconnoiter. This was necessary, or at least prudent, to show the daring natives that a sufficient number of white men could be found to frustrate any designs they might have formed.

The news greatly alarmed Mrs. Powell, and she feared a collision with the revengeful blacks, which might endanger her family and the lives of her children. Deeply did she feel the obligations she owed to their guest, and she awaited his return with impatience, anxious to express her gratitude. In this, however, she was doomed to be disappointed, at least for

that evening. They had waited supper for him more than a quarter of an hour, when a message was brought from him by the stock-keeper, to the effect that he could not come. They were moreover informed that he had gone into the bush with one of the blacks, not only for the purpose of recovering the horse, but also for that of examining the camp of the blacks, to ascertain their strength, and whether any real danger was to be apprehended.

Mr. Bale shook his head at this somewhat foolhardy night expedition in company with that "worthless, treacherous set." At the same time, he declared that it was his opinion that M'Donald did not look as if he would be easily worsted, and no doubt he would return on the following morning perfectly well. He added that it was his intention to let them know a bit of his mind, and teach them what it was to insult a white woman.

Mr. Powell was not altogether pleased at his guest's rash expedition. M'Donald was not even well acquainted with the forest, and would have to rely entirely upon his black guide; but he did not give expression to his thoughts, as the ladies seemed quite uneasy enough. He told Mr. Bale to arm the people, and hold them in readiness for the following morning, when the man with the ration cart should go to the shepherd's hut, for the purpose of searching the nearest bush, and, if necessary, of clearing it.

The preparations commenced at break of day. Sarah was alone in the breakfast parlor, laying the table and getting the simple meal ready, when the door suddenly opened, and M'Donald entered. He looked pale and grave, and only answered the kind words she addressed to him with a silent and almost sad smile. The maiden's heart—why, she knew not herself—grew heavy with forebodings of impending misfortune.

"Do you know that your rash crusade of last night made us very uneasy?" she said, at last, as a friendly reproach.

"I am extremely sorry to hear that, for I had quite an opposite intention," said M'Donald. "I wished to reassure you, and at the same time to ascertain for myself the exact number of the tribe encamped about here. I can now give you the satisfactory news that you need entertain no fears for your safety. Your horse is also recovered."

"You met the blacks, then?" inquired Sarah, anxiously.

"I got close to their camp and counted their fires," replied M'Donald, smiling.

"This could be done in perfect safety," he continued, "on so dark a night; for they are too superstitious to venture very far beyond their light."

"I was rather surprised yesterday at the thorough knowledge you showed of their language," said Sarah, blushing—"indeed, so surprised and frightened with the adventure, that I have not yet thanked you for your assistance as I might have wished."

"Miss Sarah," replied M'Donald, with deep emotion, "the recollection of the small service I have been happy enough to render you will always be a ray of sunshine in my life, not over rich in joys. Let me take that with me into the cold, friendless world, and preserve me ever so small a place in your heart, from which may God avert pain and sorrow!"

"You design to leave us again?" exclaimed Sarah, with painful surprise.

"Yes, this very morning," answered M'Donald, firmly.

"I am even afraid," he added, in a low voice, "I have already stayed too long, and I must go away."

"And what compels you to depart thus?" asked Sarah, evidently striving to seem calm and collected.

"My father likes you," she added, "and will do anything in his power to keep you in our neighborhood. Then, is it right to come to one's friends to confer upon them obligations never to be forgotten, and to leave them suddenly, as if you were tired of their intercourse? What would you say, were I to entreat you to stay for a short time only?"

"You must not do so," replied M'Donald, hurriedly; "I might not, perhaps, be able to refuse such a request."

"Then I make it most earnestly," said Sarah, while a tell-tale blush suffused her cheeks and brow; "and both my father and mother will support it."

"What, my child?" asked Mr. Powell, stepping in with his wife, "what is the matter?"

"Mr. M'Donald wishes to leave us already, and I said you would second my request for him to stay longer with us."

"With all my heart," exclaimed Mr. Powell. "My dear friend, you must on no condition think of leaving us so soon. Did you not wish to look out for a cattle-run in the neighborhood?"

"It appears that you wish to run away in order to escape the expression of our gratitude for rescuing our dear child," exclaimed Mrs. Powell, affectionately taking M'Donald's hand.

"Are you so indifferent at having preserved a whole family from a fearful misfortune?"

"I will stay," answered M'Donald, suddenly, but with a painful expression upon his countenance; "at least, I will remain for some time to prove to you how gladly, how very gladly I avail myself of your hospitality."

"But I hope you are not making any sacrifice," exclaimed Mr. Powell, quickly; "for it did not escape him that his guest was strangely moved. 'You must not neglect your own affairs for our sakes; you must recollect that we poor inhabitants of the bush cling rather tenaciously to every one who becomes dear to us. You may therefore expect that we shall all display the same unwillingness to part with you weeks and months hence, that we have shown to-day.'"

"It is my most fervent wish you may never repent your kindness," said M'Donald, taking the hand offered to him and shaking it most heartily.

"Now come in to breakfast, children," said Mrs. Powell; "where is Lisbeth, and Bill, and Ned, and John? Come in; the tea will be cold, and the whole breakfast spoiled."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT WITH THE BLACKS.

WHILE the household were at breakfast, all was life and agitation at the station. Mr. Powell had ordered his two stock-keepers, who happened to be there, to accompany him on an excursion into the bush. He had, moreover, armed his bullock-drivers, and added to the party the two hut-keepers of the station itself, in order to make as respectable a troop as possible to take against the blacks; thus hoping at once to awe them sufficiently to deter them from any future attacks.

Mr. Powell knew very well that he had nothing to fear from the blacks near the house, while such a troop remained in the vicinity of the station; the men very seldom or never offer violence to the whites; on the contrary, they do their utmost to show how friendly they are disposed toward them. Whether these feelings are sincere or feigned, is quite a different matter.

Mr. Bale was in the meantime mustering his small troop, examining their arms, and enlightening his men with the narration of some of his fights in the bush, and giving particular cautions against straggling and getting in the rear.

"Hang the black rascals!" he exclaimed, with an oath; "whenever they can get at a man from behind, they do so, and the cursed wooden spears are certain death. If you face them, they cannot take so much time for their aim, and the eye of their antagonist awes them. The rascals are nothing but cowards after all, and run away like wild dogs when they do not fight in a large body, or cannot attack from behind."

As Mr. Powell only intended to take a morning ride in the bush, the preparations were soon completed. The men, who had already breakfasted, carried some provisions with them, in case they should stay in the bush after noon. They awaited rather impatiently the arrival of their master and the order for their march.

Mr. Powell came at last, accompanied by M'Donald and his sons. The latter—at least, George and Bill, the eldest—soon mounted their horses, so as not to cause any delay. Ned walked at his father's side unarmed, and sorely displeased, for he had been ordered by his father not to accompany the expedition, but to stay at home with him to protect the house and family. After all, it was not safe to place entire reliance upon their black neighbors.

"Have you told the men how I wish this affair to be conducted, Mr. Bale?" Mr. Powell asked the chief stock-keeper.

"Above all things, take care not to fall into disorder."

"It is all right," replied the Yorkshireman; "we will give these black rascals such a lesson

that, by heavens! they will not annoy a white lady again, and above all, Miss Sarah!"

"I am afraid you misunderstood me, Mr. Bale," said Mr. Powell, very gravely; "I expressly forbid you to use violence against these unfortunate men; and you must have recourse to your arms only in the last extremity, and in self defense."

"Self-defense!" exclaimed one of the stock-keepers, with astonishment.

"Certainly, only in self-defense," was the firm and decisive answer. "I will not, by over-severity or recklessness, cause blood to be spilled unnecessarily, and thereby arouse the anger of the blacks, and perhaps, goad them to take vengeance upon some innocent people. Most murders committed at the stations arise from such causes. We do them plenty of harm by forcibly taking possession of their hunting grounds, without scattering death in their ranks. The offense committed by a few of them yesterday certainly requires to be noticed. We must show them that we have the means and power to punish them, did we desire to do so. For this purpose I have arranged this excursion. They are easily frightened, and this will be a warning to them in future. I hope you understand me, Mr. Bale?"

"Perfectly, sir," answered the stock-keeper, sulkily. "I would, however, have you remember, that by too great leniency you make them overbearing instead of frightening them."

"Do not fear that such will be the case. One word more. Let there be no firing, not even in the air, as men are so fond of doing whenever they get a gun into their hands. It makes the blacks daring, and they usually fancy you have fired at them and missed. There must be no firing but in a case of extremity, and then in such a manner that every shot shall, if possible, tell. You see I am not, as you seem to fancy, inclined to take only half measures, but I will have no blood spilled unnecessarily. Do you think, M'Donald, we could induce one of those fellows lounging idly yonder before their fires to guide us?"

"Scarcely," replied the latter; "but we can try. It is, however, ten to one that the two troops are more closely allied than they seem to admit; and if one of them should consent to go with us, it would be a question whether he could be trusted."

"Well, we can at least try," answered Mr. Powell. "You speak their language, and the man who accompanied you last night may perhaps be induced to act as guide to-day."

With M'Donald he walked toward the camp of the blacks, leaving Mr. Bale in by no means a friendly or conciliatory mood.

"The old story again," he muttered, "running after these black rascals just to wish them a good-morning, and then to return."

"Wait until we get out, Mr. Bale," said George, who had returned with his horse and overheard Bale's remark. "Father is always too cautious in this respect; nevertheless, we will give them a reminder. They shall not frighten Sarah for nothing."

"Yes, and then I shall catch it," murmured the stock-keeper; "it is rather dangerous jacking on this subject with the governor."

"Nonsense; we must show them we are in earnest," replied the young man, burning with impatience to try his strength with the blacks. Like most of his countrymen, he considered them as little better than wild dogs, and would not have made much difference between shooting one of them and a dingo.

Meantime Mr. Powell and his companion had reached the camp of the blacks. They found it in complete tranquillity and comfortable indifference, in spite of the warlike preparations going on so near. They had just finished their breakfast, at which they had devoured the remains of the three sheep they had received the day before. The women crouched by the fires, and the men were stretched out upon their backs, in order to give the stomach full play for digestion. The dogs alone were still at work at the bones which their masters had thrown to them. They gnawed one, while they held two more under their paws, lest some other dog should seize the scarce and precious booty.

Only one native had taken up his station away from the camp. This was Nguyulloman, whose gunyos was situated on the summit of a small isolated sand-hill, distant about sixty paces. He had kept up a good fire, and seemed to be the only one who had anything left of the provisions given the night before, which he

was just preparing in a way peculiar to himself. Sometimes he covered the coals with a large piece of bark, to smother the fire; at another moment he admitted the air, and let the thick smoke rise until the flames broke out anew. At the same time he devoured his meal, without seeming to trouble himself much about the rest of the tribe.

"It seems," said Mr. Powell, pointing to the cripple, "as if he was wading in the sand up to his hips, and that is why he moves with so much difficulty. What a poor wretch! If his tribe were to forsake him, he must die of hunger."

"I am not sure of that," replied M'Donald, who had thoughtfully examined the strange form of the cripple.

"I am far from considering this cripple so inoffensive, and the boomerang which he wears tied round his neck shows that he is at least capable of handling this weapon. I feel satisfied he creeps up to a kangaroo more stealthily than any young fellow in his tribe, and his aim is sure enough. It is most remarkable to observe with what skill he throws bones or pieces of wood at those dogs which approach too near—he never misses."

"Yes, indeed, and these lean brutes have the greatest possible respect for him," continued Mr. Powell, laughing. "But let us go to the 'burkas,' and see what is to be done with them."

M'Donald addressed the blacks, who had half-risen from their recumbent posture on their arrival. He asked Kakurru to guide them. But another thick-headed, white-haired fellow, who had almost as many wrinkles on his face as punctured marks on his shoulders and back, answered for him; not in his own language, but in the most frightful English.

"Black tribes there," was about the meaning of his speech—"bad fellows—take much butter and can cast charms—make rain and wind, and dry up the waterholes. White men have given them meat—good—but they are honest blacks—steal no horses and no sheep, and live at peace with their neighbors. If they accompany the white men, the black men will come in the night to suck up their butter and make them blind, and spear women and children."

Kakurru, too, did not seem inclined to accept the offer; he laid down again, put his hands under his head, and closed his eyes.

"Well, if you don't like to go, stay here," said Mr. Powell, who prided himself on knowing the men with whom he had to deal; "but if one of you had gone with us as a guide, I should have given him another fat sheep as a reward."

Kakurru opened his eyes, but did not stir.

"Perhaps two, if I had reason to be satisfied with him," replied Mr. Powell with a smile, as if confident of victory.

The elders conversed together for a good while, in such low whispers that even M'Donald could not understand what they said. Contrary to their expectations, the result of the conference was a negative. Kakurru did not stir, and the remainder declared they would have nothing to do with this business."

"Two sheep are good," said the white-haired fellow, "but black tribe is very bad; do not like to irritate them."

Mr. Powell did not seem altogether disinclined to make a higher offer, but M'Donald prevented him, saying:

"For God's sake, leave the blacks to follow their own inclinations. The most you could do would be to induce them to accept of your offer, and to lead us somewhere into the bush; but certainly not to the place where the other tribe is encamped. They do not like to have anything to do with the transaction, and I can easily understand their motives. Let us search the country, and if we find no blacks in the neighborhood so much the better. If we do meet with them, we shall show them that we are their masters, and thus accomplish our purpose."

"Very well, I am quite willing. Just look at the cripple; I think he has fallen asleep."

Nguyulloman had apparently fallen asleep. He lay motionless by the fire. Some of the dogs which had already devoured their share dispersed, and crept, slowly and carefully, toward the hill. When one got hold of a bit of meat or a bone, he snatched it up, and, with his tail between his legs, ran away with all haste to devour his choice morsel in safety at some distance. This encouraged the others, and two of the boldest had ventured to within

about fifteen paces of the cripple, in order to take possession of a sheep's head, which was already pretty well cleared of the flesh, when Nguyulloman raised his dark and crooked form with the quickness of lightning, and threw at the frightened animals two sharp bones which he held in readiness, with such force and unerring aim, that the poor brutes yelled aloud with pain and scampered away as fast as possible. After this, the dogs kept at a respectful distance.

The skill with which the apparently helpless cripple had thrown the bones was really astonishing. He, however, did not seem to think it extraordinary; but continued, as before, busily engaged with his fire, only casting an occasional glance at the white man now advancing toward him.

If Mr. Powell had intended to enter into conversation with him, he was prevented by a discovery which he made on reaching the top of the hill. From the gum-bush, at the distance of about two miles, a thin smoke rose high into the air, and his shout:

"There is the camp of the blacks!" called M'Donald's attention to the spot.

"If such be the case," said M'Donald, "they have only removed this morning. Last night they were encamped in that direction, and I am sure that they did not alter their position in the dark."

"Perhaps they are going away," Mr. Powell suggested. "In that case it is so much the more necessary to prove to them before they do so, that we are well prepared for them, or else we shall have them back in a few days more daring still. Be so kind, therefore, Mr. M'Donald to take the men with Mr. Bale, in that direction, and once more let me entreat you not to allow blood to be shed, if not absolutely necessary." Before ascending the hill, Mr. Powell turned to Nguyulloman and said to him:

"That smoke comes from the tribes which were encamped yonder last night, doesn't it?"

"Don't know," the latter replied, sulkily. "When black man sleeps at night, he makes a fire; when he goes away in the morning, he lets it burn."

This was all that could be got out of him. Meantime the small troop, headed by Mr. Powell's two sons, anxiously awaited his return. As soon as he came with M'Donald they all vaulted into their saddles.

"And now let us be off!" cried Mr. Bale, "or else we shall give the black beasts too great a start, and in the end they'll believe that we are afraid of them!"

"They are in that direction, and not far off," Mr. Bale, said Mr. Powell. "From the hill we perceived their camp-fires."

"In that direction?" said the overseer, with surprise. "I thought they were in quite an opposite quarter."

"At any rate, smoke is to be seen yonder," observed M'Donald.

"Well, so much the better," replied the stock-keeper, to himself, with a laugh, "there is nothing but the salt bush between us and them, and we shall be able to go all the way at full speed. Any further orders, Mr. Powell?"

"None—remember what I told you before."

"Forward, then!" he called out. Turning his horse's head, he took a flying leap over the barrier, which was about four feet and a half high. Mr. Powell's two sons followed him at once, and so did M'Donald, who again rode his gray horse. The shepherds and hut-keepers, mounted for the occasion, went more carefully to work. They first got one of the men who remained behind at the station to take out the bars, in spite of the jeers and laughing of the cattle-drivers, all practiced horsemen; and then they followed the rest of the party, who had already got a considerable start.

Mr. Bale, riding at the head of the troop, discovered the smoke, and was about to urge his men to a brisker pace, in order to come up with the blacks as soon as possible, and to track them in case they had left their camp, when M'Donald perceived some one standing in the bush on their right, on somewhat higher and more open ground, making signals to them. At his command the party halted, and by the aid of a small pocket-telescope which he carried with him, he made out a white man standing on the top of a malley hill, who probably for want of a handkerchief, was waving his jacket round his head.

"That is the hut-keeper, Miller," said Mr. Bale, after a glance through the glass; "something must have happened, or else the lazy fel-

low would not come here from the station at such an early hour." At any rate, we must go to him and see."

Without waiting for an answer, M'Donald rode toward the spot in which he had seen the man, who, as soon as he perceived the horsemen coming toward him, ran and met them half-way.

It was, as Mr. Bale had said, Miller, the German hut-keeper. Pale, exhausted with his hasty run, he had scarcely sufficient breath left to relate what had brought him from the station.

"The blacks!" he gasped forth, as soon as he came within hearing of the horsemen—"the blacks—have—attacked the station—driven away the sheep—all, all, away."

"The devil!" exclaimed Bale. "The whole herd?"

"Scattered and carried off," was the answer.

"This morning?" asked George, approaching hastily.

"Yes—that is—before daybreak."

"Then this idle rascal has been sleeping again!" exclaimed Bale, darting an angry look at the poor fellow.

Miller attempted to defend himself, but the overseer gave him no time for it.

"Brown and Bartlett," said he, "ride as quickly as you can to the spot where we saw the smoke. We must ascertain whether they are really there, or whether it is only a stratagem, in order to lead us on a false track. If, as I suppose, you find nothing, you will cross the dry creek which runs in the direction, and come to the salt-ponds. You know the place. This is the easiest plan; and if the black thieves have driven the sheep in that direction, we shall meet there. At any rate, I shall leave some one to wait for you. If you arrive first, wait. But if they should have gone this way, which is not probable, one of you come and let me know, while the other follows the track. The rest of us will ride to the station; they cannot move very rapidly, with the sheep, and we must overtake them."

The orders were executed instantly. The two stock-men turned off to the left, and in a few minutes, Miller was alone in the bush. He returned much more slowly than he had come, and seemed to be considerably cut up for the loss of the sheep. As they had been driven away during the night, when under his care, he would be answerable for the loss, if they were not recovered.

After an hour's ride, the small troop reached the station, where Hendricks was just returning, bathed in perspiration; with a gun upon his shoulder. He had followed the tracks which led northward into the thickest part of the bush, and he requested the horsemen, whom he had certainly not expected so soon, at once to go in pursuit. The tracks were distinct, so that they could not miss them; and, mounted as they were, they must soon overtake the blacks.

"At what o'clock were they driven away?" inquired Bale, anxious to obtain some idea of the distance they might have gone since that time.

"How do I know?" replied Hendricks. "That lazy hut-keeper and his wretched cur were both fast asleep; and when I rose this morning, at daybreak, and found the yard empty, I had to wake them both."

"Did they take the whole herd off?"

"No; they know better than that," replied the shepherd. "I have already recovered some seventy or eighty, and there is a good many running about the bush. The dingoes have been among them. I think they have driven off some eighty or a hundred; such a number are more easily taken care of. At first the lot was larger, as I could see by the tracks; but they have left behind those that were somewhat slow, and only taken the fleetest."

"Who is that in the hut?" said the overseer, suddenly, with an inquiring glance at the shepherd.

"In the hut?" replied the latter confused.

"Yes; I saw this sheet of bark moving. Is any one there?"

"Hem!—yes; a poor devil of a bundleman, who arrived last night. He is looking out for work. He sprained his foot, and can't get on; in fact he was altogether out of sorts. He is lying on my bed."

Bale dismounted, gave his horse to one of the men to hold, and entered the hut. He had, of course, nothing to say against the hospitality

offered to the stranger, but he wished to see who he was.

When he got into the hut, he looked at once toward the spot where he had seen the sheet of bark moving; but that part was empty. The stranger was reclining on the bed, placed against the opposite side of the wall, with his back turned to the door.

"Hallo, my friend! where do you come from?"

"Hallo, sir!" replied he, turning round. "I am confoundedly out of sorts, and was glad to reach this place last night."

"Where do you come from?"

"North-west Bend."

"Are you a shepherd?"

"I understand the business."

"Can you shear?"

"I think so."

"Well, perhaps there is a place for you here," said Bale. The wild appearance of the man did not strike him as anything extraordinary. Most people of the sort who wander through the bush look more like escaped highwaymen than honest laboring men.

"Stay here until we return, and I'll talk to Mr. Powell about it. I have no doubt that the German who is hut-keeper here must be sent away, for this is the third time he has neglected his duty. I must be off now." And he went out and mounted.

"Mr. M'Donald, if you have no objection, we'll go at once after the black rascals, and I am sure that Mr. Powell can have nothing to say against it, if we give them a sharp lesson. If we let this pass unpunished, they will burn our houses over our heads next. Point out the track, Hendricks, and try to collect as many of the sheep out of the bush as you can."

"Ay, ay, sir!" replied the shepherd, moving on quickly. He had not to go far; close to the hurdles the broad and distinct track by which the sheep had been driven by the blacks was visible; further in the bush, the marks were deeply impressed in the soft sand, and could not be well mistaken.

As soon as the horsemen had reached the tracks, the stockman put spurs to his steed, and galloped forward at full speed. When they came to the so-called "salt-pond," a remarkable spot in the bush, they halted, to wait for the men sent in the direction in which they had first seen the smoke.

The "salt-pond" was situated in a flat, arid plain, surrounded on all sides by red malley hills. It was calculated to make a strong impression upon any European seeing it for the first time. A spot of about two hundred feet in diameter looked, in spite of the heat, which was becoming oppressive, exactly as if it was covered with strong and firm ice.

The blacks had passed this way with the sheep, and the young Powells glowed with impatience to pursue the thieves. Bale, however, tried to restrain their ardor—for to judge by the traces in the sand, the blacks were more numerous than was at first supposed.

Their patience was not, however, sorely taxed. The two horsemen arrived in about a quarter of an hour, and announced the smoke arose from a small fire without gunyoes, and that they could distinguish the tracks of only one solitary black.

Nothing now prevented the immediate pursuit of the thieves, and the troop galloped forward, as quickly as the nature of the ground would permit, preceded by the stock-keeper and M'Donald; the one keeping the tracks on the right, the other those on the left.

Fortunately for them, the blacks had, on account of the sheep, been forced to keep to the open ground, in order to get away faster. The pursuers entertained little doubt of very soon overtaking the depredators, as the sheep must naturally retard their progress, when they suddenly came upon six sheep lying dead in the bush, with their bellies ripped open.

"This is some of their work!" cried the overseer, stopping by the slaughtered animals, and dismounting. "But what can be the meaning of this? Surely, the rascals do not know that we are upon their tracks."

"At their old tricks, no doubt," said one of the other stock-keepers, with an oath. "Just see whether they have left the kidneys."

"No, they are gone!" exclaimed Mr. Bale. "What pampered gluttons! I suppose we shall find the whole flock in this state."

"The longer we delay, the more sheep will be slaughtered," said M'Donald.

"True, we have not a moment to lose. Forward!" cried Bale, and remounting, he put

spurs to his horse, and rushed to the head of the troop. They no longer had any trouble in making out the tracks; these were plainly indicated by the slaughtered sheep. They found them one or two at a time, from all of which, nothing but the kidney had been taken. The blacks had, however, lost time in these delays, and when the troop arrived at the top of the hill, they could see the whole tribe quietly resting on the borders of a thick and disagreeable-looking malley-bush. The natives knew very well that the horsemen could not follow them into this, and did not fear them so much when dismounted. Some of them were busily engaged slaughtering some of the sheep, probably only with the view of taking from them the delicate kidneys, while others were driving the remainder of the flock, consisting perhaps of twelve or fourteen, into the bush, in which they immediately disappeared.

Further orders were not wanted. Every man saw his goal before him, and, looking out for the most favorable spot, the horsemen dashed at full speed down the hill, toward the blacks, still busily engaged in their occupation. The latter, had, no doubt, perceived their pursuers before—had even, perhaps, been apprised of their arrival by spies concealed in strange hiding-places. In spite of this, they continued their work until the horsemen were about two hundred paces from them, when they also dived into the thicket, with their light booty and blood-stained hands.

A few moments after, the foaming horses stood at the borders of the malley-bushes, which stretched their straight arms toward them, covered with green foliage, as if to keep them away. Bale was perfectly well acquainted with the ground, and at once divided his men into two divisions. One of these he committed to the direction of the second stock-keeper, whose cattle-run was in this neighborhood, desiring him to surround the wood on the right, and to cut off the retreat of the blacks in the direction of the open plain behind; while, accompanied by M'Donald and the two young Powells, he struck off to the left for the same purpose.

Bale judged wisely. The route he had chosen being the shorter of the two, he reached the small salt-bush plain just in time to overtake the principal troop of the blacks, at that moment emerging from the thickets. Had they succeeded in crossing this plain, they would have been perfectly safe.

"We have caught them!" shouted the hardy bushman, exultingly rising in his stirrups and brandishing his gun above his head—"we have the whole gang." Having said this, he gave his horse the spurs, clearing the nearest bushes at one bound, and troubling his head but little whether the rest were following him or not, dashed in among the blacks, dismayed by the sudden and unexpected appearance of the enemy.

They, however, soon formed their plan. While the women and children kept running in the first direction, the men brandishing their spears boldly advanced to receive their enemies, who were, indeed, inferior in point of numbers, but far superior in arms.

It was natural that the white men should let the women and children continue their flight without hindrance, and that they should accept the proffered combat. Bale knew the ground. Calling upon the rest to follow him, his only aim seemed to be to cut off the retreat of the women and children from the woods. M'Donald and the two young Powells, on the contrary, caring little for the women and children, and scarcely heeding Bale's command, rode boldly at the blacks, who had now suddenly halted. Bale understood the stratagem. A small ravine rendered it impossible for the horses to get near the main body of the blacks, who, as soon as these saw the enemy had fallen into the snare into which they wished to allure them, and whence they would have to make a great detour to reach them, disappeared with the quickness of lightning behind the low bushes, and fled toward the protecting thickets. Bale alone outstripped them. Dashing through the midst of the terrified women, who scattered with loud cries, he succeeded in reaching the open space at the bottom of the sand-hill, before the blacks. The latter, pressed on the other side by a greater danger, would not, of course, give way before a single white man. They kept among a number of low, but thick entangled salt-bushes, before which the overseer had stopped, while two of them, slowly and silently

crept nearer, and, from a secure hiding-place, threw their short wooden spears at the rider and his horse. At the same moment the overseer, goaded by blind fury, discharged his gun, loaded with large shot, into the midst of the blacks, who answered the report with a howl of pain. His horse, frightened at the noise of the discharge, reared, and, just as it showed its breast above the bushes, three spears struck it almost at the same instant, inflicting mortal wounds.

The blacks uttered a shout of triumph, and rushed at the horse, which was rearing and plunging, mad with pain, and Bale had the greatest difficulty in maintaining his seat. M'Donald who had leaped the narrower part of the ravine, was now coming to his rescue, and at the noise of his approach the assailants withdrew. At that moment, the other party of the stockmen appeared upon the other side. George and William, who had galloped around the ravine, were now making up for lost time, and advanced at full speed.

George was the first to arrive. Leaping to the ground, he fired his gun, loaded with ball, at random, in the direction in which the last blacks were retreating into the bush.

Just as the report was heard, one of the natives sprung high in the air, gave two or three bounds forward, clutched at one of the bushes, and then fell backward upon the sand.

"Hurrah!" shouted William; "that was a good shot. Let us advance." With these words, he made his horse bound over the ground to the spot where the man had fallen. M'Donald kept close at his side.

A few of the blacks had separated from the rest, probably anxious to remove the wounded man into the bush; but the horsemen were too close upon their heels to admit of this. Hurling their spears, which fell too short, or, from being hastily thrown, flew past them, they again disappeared in the thicket.

One dark form, reckless of the approach of the white men, rushed out from the shelter and bent over the body, uttering loud lamentations. At this moment William's horse missed its footing and fell, throwing its rider over its head. M'Donald turned round, and leaped out of the saddle; but young Powell, full of activity, and accustomed to such accidents, was soon upon his feet.

"Down with the black dogs!" he exclaimed, putting his gun to his shoulder. He fired at the form which was bent over the corpse. M'Donald stood near enough to prevent the murder, and knocking the barrel of the gun aside with his hand, exclaimed, indignantly:

"Fie! shame on you, young man, to fire at a woman!"

"A woman!" cried William, with amazement; "but what matters? the whole race must be exterminated, or else we shall never be at peace."

As he uttered these words, he encountered the steady and almost threatening glance of M'Donald, and he turned away, half in shame and half in anger, to catch his horse, which had got up again. The female, however, a young girl—who had cast herself in wild despair upon the corpse of one of her kindred, seemed to feel herself safe, or perhaps was indifferent to her danger in the deep sorrow occasioned by her loss. In mute and bitter woe she buried her face upon the breast of the murdered man, all her limbs trembling with anguish and excitement.

George had also hastened to the spot, in order to examine his victim. As he approached the sad group, a very different feeling to that of triumph crept over his heart; and in a low whisper he asked, pointing to the corpse: "Is he dead?"

"Your aim was sure," replied M'Donald, coldly: "he will steal no more sheep."

"But there are two. Did I kill *two*?" asked George, with consternation.

"I think so, although not with the same bullet. This unfortunate being is a young girl, who bewails the death of her father or brother. But let us return and support the rest, or try, at least, to get the sheep back. Where is Mr. Bale?"

"Here he comes," replied George, in a broken voice, without raising his eyes from the afflicted woman. At that moment two more shots were heard in the bush.

"More blood!" exclaimed M'Donald, with a deep sigh. "More and more, until the breach between the black and the white men gets wider and wider. Can we wonder at their seeking a deadly revenge?"

The other division almost surrounded the first thicket, in which some of the natives with sheep were still hidden. They could not penetrate into it with their horses, and as they rode round it, the natives threw their spears at them, one of which slightly wounded the second stock-keeper on the thigh. This effected the object they had in view, which was to gather the enraged white men on one spot; and suddenly the greater number of the blacks darted out of the upper extremity of the thicket, which was scarcely a hundred paces from the principal bush, driving the terrified sheep before them with loud cries. Some of the animals escaped right and left; but the blacks succeeded in making off with the greater number of them. The enraged shepherds and stock-keepers dashed toward the spot in which they had disappeared. All they could do was to fire their guns at the fugitives.

One of their party had got separated from the rest, or let the right moment for making his escape slip. The second stock-keeper cut off his retreat and tried to knock him down; but failing in this, he leaped off his horse. Before he could take aim, the black raised his spear, hurled it, and struck his foe on the breast. Fortunately for the latter, it hit the buckle of a small leathern bag which he carried slung over his shoulder, and rebounded. As the black pursued his flight, the whole charge of a large swan-shot was lodged in his back, from the distance of about twenty paces. The poor fellow ran four or five paces further, and then, with outstretched arms, he fell down, burying his face in the sand.

CHAPTER VII.

RETURN OF THE EXPEDITION

THE fight, with its excitement and fury, was over. The blacks had taken refuge in the bush, where the white men might, perhaps, have followed, certainly with but little chance of finding them; so that further pursuit was given up as entirely useless. The men were busy looking after the scattered sheep and driving them together—by no means an easy task, for the animals had become dreadfully shy and terrified. At last, those accustomed to this sort of work succeeded in collecting them together, and a shepherd and a hut-keeper were told to drive them back to the station.

The rest of the party were to pick up, on their way home, the slaughtered animals, and take as many of them as possible upon their horses.

"What is to be done with the corpse?" said George, who seemed to have forgotten everything else, to M'Donald; indeed, he had only just ventured to approach the place where it lay.

"I suppose we must leave it with the girl," replied the latter; "otherwise, I should like to have buried it."

"Buried!" exclaimed Bale, just returning with his saddle on his back, and in no friendly mood, on account of the loss of his horse. "Why should we plague ourselves about such black carrion? Let them go to the devil, the black rascals! The dingoes, their good friends and comrades, will know what to do with them."

"No, no," replied George, quickly; "the bodies—at least, not this one," he added in a low voice—"must not be left to the beasts of prey. The thought would haunt me all my life. The poor wretches have paid dearly enough, and they are men after all."

"Men? I'll be hanged if I think so!" exclaimed the overseer. "However, you do as you like, I shall certainly not move a finger. If I could exterminate them all at one blow, I would do so, even at the risk of contaminating the air for a few months, and should consider I had done a good deed. The devil!" he suddenly exclaimed, throwing his saddle upon the ground, and raising his gun, "why, one of the brutes is still alive!"

"Stop!" cried M'Donald, stepping before him, "that is a woman weeping over the corpse."

"We'll save her the trouble," replied the man, with a fiendish laugh, maddened by the loss of his good horse.

"This woman is under my protection!" said M'Donald, firmly confronting the heartless man. "There has been enough blood shed to-day, and Mr. Powell does not wish that murder should be committed by those in his service."

Bale flushed with anger he could but with difficulty suppress, almost unconsciously directed his gun against the man who was resisting his authority. But the recollection of the events of the last hour soon brought him to himself again. It was M'Donald who, by his sudden arrival, had probably saved his life; and this he had not forgotten. In spite of his apparent roughness, Bale was not only an honest and upright but also the kindest-hearted man imaginable, who never would have contemplated doing anybody the least wrong.

On this occasion he was extremely vexed at not having been able to punish the "rascals" who had killed his horse; nor did he seem to think it an extraordinary proceeding to endeavor to make some other member of the tribe atone for it, even though that somebody might be a woman. The decided manner of the stranger toward him did not please him. After all, where did he come from, and who was he? At any other time this would have aroused his unbending spirit of resistance; but he would not treat as an enemy the preserver of Miss Sarah, to whom he was devoted with all his heart; at least, he could not do so, on account of an insignificant black, and he made a violent effort to stifle the anger rising in his breast. For a moment he met the cold, dark gaze of the stranger fiercely enough; then leaning on his gun, he said—

"Well, let her go, if you think fit. I have to thank you for saving my life. Were I to have my way, I know what I should do."

"Who will help me to bury the body?" asked M'Donald.

"I will," said George, in a low but firm tone. "Come, Mr. M'Donald, let us put the poor devil under ground."

"Well, that is hardly worth the trouble," the overseer observed, laughing, as he carried his saddle to put it on William's horse; "but men like to have their way."

The two white men approached the corpse, and M'Donald gently touched the girl upon the shoulder.

"Come, child," said he, in a friendly tone, "get up and follow your people; you have nothing to fear. We will bury the body to keep off the dingoes and birds of prey."

The girl arose slowly, and looked with wild, fearful eyes from one to the other. The fluency with which the stranger spoke her language also terrified her. At the same time she recognized the man who had twice stepped between her and the white foes. He could not mean evil toward her. With her hands stretched toward him, and in a confident manner, she entreated him:

"Oh, leave him to me; do not take him away. His gray head is red with blood and his limbs are stiff. Let Pelyurko show him the honor which belongs to his age and rank."

"What does she say?" asked George, in a hoarse voice. "Does she accuse me of murder?"

"No," replied M'Donald; "she desires nothing but to be left alone with the corpse. I think it will be best to do as she wishes."

"Come, sir," said George, in feverish haste, "let us leave the poor woman alone; I—I cannot stand it."

"Well," asked Bale, laughing, when he saw the two men returning without having accomplished their purpose, "is the burial already over? You can't have had a very long funeral oration."

To this speech George returned no answer, but took the reins, jumped into the saddle and dashed homeward, straight through the bush, as fast as his horse could carry him. Bale was watching him, when M'Donald turned round and said, in a friendly manner:

"It seems to me that you are lame. I suppose you got hurt in your fall. If you have no objection, take my horse; I am a good walker, and can easily get over these few miles."

"Thank you, sir; thank you, very heartily," replied Bale, fully appreciating the offer. "You are too good, and I will not inconvenience you. I have already asked Master William to make one of those lazy shepherds get off his horse. I think he is coming already. After all, the shepherds don't know how to sit a horse, and can get over the ground a great deal better on foot."

The whole party, now united, went round the thicket, collected as many dead sheep as the horses could carry, and set forward slowly toward the Murray.

Meantime Pelyurko sat still and motionless by the dead body of her father. Without complaint, without tears, with fixed glance, she followed the white murderers as long as she could see them; and, when they had disappeared in the bush, bent her eyes on vacancy.

Other eyes besides those of the mourning child watched the departure of the white men. Out of the bush, and the patches of sharp prickly grass, glided two forms, glossy with the fat with which they had covered themselves, and bent down to raise the dead body. Pelyurko did not disturb them in the performance of their duty. They were the young men of her tribe; and, with slow steps, and her head hanging down, she followed the bearers. Further on, their comrades were seen, carrying the other dead body into the bush; and for full an hour, an uninterrupted stillness reigned in the wilderness, in which so recently the dread sounds of strife re-echoed.

Sudden, out of the bush, a loud wail, long and solitary, arose, penetrating to the inmost recesses of the heart. When it had died away, the desert seemed to be as silent and desolate as before, when again a wild chorus of women's voices were heard, lamenting for the dead, in broken, trembling accents.

The wind ceased to whistle through the branches; the leaves no longer rustled; the talkative birds in the bush were silent; and nothing was heard over the desolate waste but the trembling wail—the death lamentation for the slain and ill-treated children of the soil.

Meanwhile the stock-keepers drove the sheep homeward. The greater portion of the flock had been recovered from the blacks and the gang punished for their misdeeds.

The shepherd Hendricks had been kept so busily employed the whole day, that he had not had a single moment to play upon his jews-harp—a thing which had not occurred to him for years. He succeeded, however, in getting the greater portion of his flock together; and when the stock-keepers brought back the animals they had recovered, only about sixty were missing.

The horsemen stopped at the outer station, and Bale alighted to examine the hurdles, as well as to vent his rage upon the careless hut-keeper, which he recollected he had scarcely had time to do in the morning.

Miller, however, expecting something of the sort, had left the hut to take care of itself, under pretense of looking after the scattered sheep. Afraid, however, of losing his way in the bush, he had concealed himself in a small thicket at a very short distance from the hut, waiting until the overseer and his men should have taken their departure.

When Bale entered the hut, hoping to find the lazy hut-keeper asleep as usual, which would have afforded him an additional excuse for beginning to storm at him, the stranger was in his place, reclining cosily upon the sheep-skins, and for want of tobacco, smoking dry leaves out of a short, black, clay pipe. He had heard the horses coming, but did not think it necessary to leave the hut on that account.

"Well, old fellow, you have taken possession of your new berth," said the stock keeper, casting a hasty glance round the place, and thus ascertaining that the man he was looking for was not there. "Has Hendricks spoken to you about it?"

"He mentioned something of the sort," replied the man, puffing a thick cloud of the wretched and offensive smoke from him. "Want to dismiss the other, I suppose?"

"Of course; the fellow is too lazy and idle to take care of himself, much less of other people's sheep. It's no use giving a fellow £20 to have him sleeping in the hut during the day, and by the hurdles at night."

"Twenty pounds is what you give?"

"Yes, when we are satisfied; green hands only get eighteen. I don't think that you are one of that description."

"I don't think I am a green one!" was the reply, accompanied by a peculiar twitch of the mouth.

"Where do you come from?"

"From Adelaide."

"You know the duties of the place?"

"Think so."

"Can you shear?"

"Shear, break horses; and am, moreover, a sort of sheep doctor."

"That's first rate," said Bale. "Most of the fellows who wander about the bush, and offer themselves as shepherds and hut-keepers, scarcely know more of a sheep than it has wool,

and can be eaten. Were you ever engaged anywhere near the Murray?"

"Yes; in Miranda, on the other side."

"Well, you can remain here, and to-morrow morning I will send you word from the governor to confirm the engagement. Do you want anything else?"

"I should think so," answered the man, looking at him as if astonished at the question. "Do you suppose that one is in the habit of wandering about the bush with pockets full of tobacco? This is the last pipe, and the article seems to be precious scarce here, too. Hendricks has already chewed my pocket because he has none left."

Bale laughed. "Very well; I will send you a pound of tobacco as earnest; and, as soon as Miller returns, tell him to come to the station."

"This evening?"

"To-morrow morning, if he likes. I shall speak to Hendricks on the subject. Something must be done to the hurdles. Get up, if you please, and I will show you what is required?"

"My foot, sir, is not all right yet," answered the man, rising slowly, in compliance with the stock-keeper's request.

"I see; you have sprained your ankle. Well, it is all right?"

"Rather better to-day; only I must take care."

The man had risen, and was trying the lame foot upon the floor. Meantime the overseer's sharp eye had perceived something between the sheep-skins which attracted his attention. Under the skins, part of a gun had become visible; and, without much ceremony, he approached, kicked the skins aside, and took hold of the fire-arm.

"Hem!—a fine gun. Does it belong to you?" asked the overseer, pronouncing the *you* with a strong emphasis, and with an expression of astonishment which he did not seek to conceal.

"Yes, I am the happy possessor," replied the man, evidently annoyed at the discovery, although he pretended to be quite indifferent about it.

"By-the-by, what is your name?" asked Bale, suddenly, "that I may know what to call you."

"My name—?—hem!" returned the stranger, with a laugh, somewhat disconcerted at the suddenness of the question, just as he was trying to invent a story about the gun; "at home, they called me Toby."

"And elsewhere?"

"Elsewhere?" repeated Toby, casting his eyes on his interlocutor.

"Well, as you say at home, I fancied that elsewhere you might have another name, or an *alias*?"

Toby laughed, and answered, shaking his head:

"No, I don't like that. Toby is quite good enough, and has long stood me in good stead. I fancy it will answer my purpose for the future too. My father's name was Brown."

"Consequently, Toby Brown, Esquire?"

"Esquire, would sound after my name just as well as after that of many another Brown or Smith," said Toby. "But here we leave such terms to swells and other people who receive and write letters. As long as I am a servant I shall be 'Toby'; if once I become my own master, and have my own flocks and herds, I shall, of course, put the 'Master' before."

"Thank you," said Bale, laughing. The droll humor of the fellow had somewhat restored his temper. "Where," added he, "did you get the gun from, if I may ask?"

"Hem! Your shepherd has also been asking anxiously," replied Toby, knitting his brows, "as if a fellow could not pay for a decent gun, just as well as any of the swells. Instead of drinking my wages, in one of those accursed bush taverns, I have bought this gun. The blacks in the bush are but too apt to rifle you of everything you have about you, if they take it into their heads."

"Well, it is no business of mine. You understand me, then; when Miller returns, you will tell him, in case I do not see Hendricks, to come to the station to-morrow morning at the latest."

"Very well, but don't forget the tobacco!"

Bale replaced the gun against the wall, and went out, followed by Toby, just as M'Donald was approaching.

"The devil!" exclaimed Toby, in astonishment, entirely forgetting his lame leg, and

starting back, "why, there is an old acquaintance!"

"Indeed! I suppose you knew Mr. M'Donald in Miranda?" said Bale.

"Mr. M'Donald?—certainly—and surely he can't have forgotten old Toby,"—with a strong emphasis on the word, and fixing his eyes upon M'Donald.

"I should say not," replied M'Donald, with a smile. "Where did you come from, Toby?"

"From the down country, sir, looking for employment, and which I have luckily found, thanks to the black thieves. May I ask since when you left the lower Murray, sir?"

A peculiar smile played round his lips as if amused at himself, but was immediately replaced by the former gravity of expression.

"Only a short time since, and am on my journey eastward," answered M'Donald. "It is very possible that I may break up to-morrow morning."

"All well at home, sir?"

"Thanks," replied M'Donald—"our fate in Australia, scattered in all directions. As you know, the station was broken up. Five have obtained permanent employment; the others are looking for work."

"And yourself, sir?"

"I am looking out for some fit pasture-ground in the neighborhood."

"A good place here, I think."

"I hope so, and also that you may stay, and find it to your advantage. I can tell you, Toby, I am heartily glad to see you here."

"Yes; if I can only settle down quietly," answered Toby. "I have been before well off at many a place, and yet must needs go in search of a better one. But as we grow older we get wiser; and I suppose sense comes with years, as people say, so I may still hope. Can I assist you in anything?"

"No, I thank you," replied M'Donald, moving away; "but," added he, with a smile, "perhaps I may be of use to you. How are you off for money?"

"A check for twenty pounds, due this day year," replied Toby, laughing, "but in other respects, as usual, empty pockets."

"There is something wherewith to buy a few things you will want in your new position," said M'Donald, throwing him a sovereign. Without waiting for his thanks, and indeed Toby seemed to be in no hurry to acknowledge his obligation, he rode to join the other stock-keepers, who were already preparing to return home.

"You might just as well have thrown your money into a well," said Bale, approaching M'Donald, at the same time giving his men a few orders. "Money is of as much use to these men as a loaded gun is to a child—dangerous both to them and others."

"He will take care not to be long exposed to the temptation," said M'Donald, laughing. "After all, he can get nothing here in the bush but tobacco, and perhaps a little rum."

"That is true. Then you knew the fellow before; is he trustworthy?"

"I would answer for none of these bushmen," replied M'Donald, not giving a direct, straightforward answer. "Most of them have been convicts, and I suppose Toby is no exception. He is reserved about his previous history; and of course one cannot tell by looking at a man's forehead what kind of a person he may be."

"No, indeed; if such were the case, many of them would not be wandering at liberty through the bush," said Bale.

"I fancy Toby is no worse than the others; the less you trust these people the better."

At this juncture their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the rest of the party. Bale gave Hendricks a few orders, and soon after a portion of the small troop galloped toward the head station, while the rest rode off to their various outposts.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BLACK POLICE.

THE evening passed gloomily enough at Mr. Powell's. Although the expedition against the blacks had been successful, Mr. Powell was by no means satisfied with the result. George did not show himself at the table; Mr. Bale, who shared the family meal, seemed to be vexed at the loss of his horse; and William had not yet forgotten the lesson he had received from their guest, and which, strangely enough, irritated him the more because he felt that he had deserved it. Is not this often the case with us in the world?

The ladies also spoke but seldom. The blood which had been shed threw a dark veil over the usually so cheerful circle, and they all broke up earlier than common. Bale proposed that the careless hut-keeper should be at once dismissed, to which Mr. Powell of course, in his excited mood, agreed, and thanked the overseer for having found another man to take his place. Miller was to be paid off on the following morning, and Toby installed in his office.

As for the blacks encamped near the station, they had behaved very quietly all day, having been principally engaged fishing. Only a few of the young men had been sent out, Mr. Powell thought to observe what was going on with the other tribe. Toward evening, these messengers appeared to bring some important news. The burkas assembled; and a long and eager conference, to which Nguyulloman came down from his hill, took place. Mr. Powell naturally thought it related to the defeat of the other tribe, with which these blacks, whatever they might say to the contrary, stood, no doubt, in closer intercourse than they were inclined to acknowledge. However, they had not helped to carry off the sheep; and Mr. Powell did not wish to annoy them, and even ordered two of the slaughtered sheep to be given to them next morning, in return for some fish they had brought in during the afternoon.

Great, therefore, was the astonishment of all the people at the station on finding, on the following morning, the camp abandoned. The fires were still smoldering, but it was evident that the whole tribe must have left at break of day. They seemed to have crossed the river, to which their tracks were traced; and on the opposite shore five or six of the usual bark canoes showed how they had got across. Only one fire was left burning; only one gunyos was yet standing—that of Nguyulloman—on the sand-hill, and the unfortunate cripple, abandoned by his tribe, was sitting alone by his fire. Had the natives fled because they were afraid lest the white men, the report of whose guns they had perhaps heard, should treat them as they had treated the others the day before? How groundless, in that case, was their fear! The direction they had taken seemed also to indicate that they had nothing to do with the thieves. Sudden, indeed must have been their flight, or they would not have abandoned this poor wretch to the mercy of the white man.

From them he had, as he knew very well, nothing to fear; and the ladies took a special interest in his welfare. They rejoiced at the prospect of being enabled, in some measure, to atone to him for the wrong inflicted upon him by his own people. Mrs. Powell herself proposed to visit him, and assure him that he need fear neither want nor violence.

In order to enable him to receive ladies in a decent manner, Mr. Powell sent him one of the blue-and-white striped shirts usually worn by the laboring men. He put it on with evident satisfaction, although the wrong way, until assisted by the hut-keeper in his toilet.

Nguyulloman's reception of the ladies, who were accompanied by Mr. Powell and M'Donald, was cold and monosyllabic. He appeared to be much depressed and annoyed at the flight of his tribe, and anxious as to the manner in which the white people would behave in consequence. When assured that he should receive his ration of meat daily until his people returned to fetch him, and when Mr. Powell, moreover, added that he would take care that he should have plenty of wood for his fire, his reserve perceptibly decreased, and he became more talkative. The latter promise turned out, however, to be unnecessary, as shortly after a little fellow, between eight and ten years old, came out of the bush with a lot of dry wood for his fire. The natives had at least taken care to supply him with the necessary fuel.

As regarded the departure of the tribe, he professed to know no more than the white men themselves. He said the burkas had kept their intention secret until they broke up. Separated as he was from their camp, he naturally enough could not tell what they had planned together.

The probable cause of their departure did not, however, long remain a mystery. The party were still standing by the solitary gunyos on the top of a hill, whence they could command an extensive view over the low valley of the river, when they saw a cloud of dust

rising in the distance, and immediately after a troop of horsemen came in sight.

"What is that?" exclaimed M'Donald, first perceiving the approach of the strangers, with surprise. "Can they be cattle-drivers taking their cattle to market at a time when there is a scarcity of grass?"

"No," said Mr. Powell; "perhaps it is a new squatter settling on the Murray; but I can only distinguish horses. Are your eyes better, Nguyulloman?"

Nguyulloman had long noticed the new-comers; nay, if his guests had observed him attentively, they would have seen that he had expected them the whole morning, for he sat with his face turned in the direction in which they first appeared, and his looks, even while he spoke, were seldom taken from the spot.

"They are only horses," replied the black, poking the fire, and looking from the new-comers to his visitors.

"And drivers with them?"

"A man upon each."

"All horsemen? That is scarcely possible. Why, where can they come from, or what is their destination?"

"They are blacks," he replied, pointing in the direction in which they were visible, and adding with maledictions in his own language, "blacks who sold themselves to the white men, in order to hurt their own brethren."

"The black police!" exclaimed Mr. Powell, with astonishment. "I have often heard of them, but never saw, and still less expected them on the Murray. If they had come but one day sooner," he added, with a deep sigh, "they would have spared us many a sad remembrance. I should like to know what can bring them into this part of the country, unless they are making a tour of inspection along the banks of the Murray, and wish to show the blacks that, in case of necessity, they are at hand."

"I thank God they are here!" said Sarah. "Their presence will, I hope, prevent any further attacks from the blacks, should they entertain the idea of avenging yesterday's deeds."

"My dear child," said Mr. Powell, calming her apprehensions, "we should not have any reason to fear, even were they not here. We are quite strong enough to brave the largest tribe of the blacks, if they intend attacking us. But they do not intend anything of the sort, and we need not alarm ourselves in this respect."

"I do not know," returned the girl. "There has been such a weight on my heart since yesterday! I did not wish to give you uneasiness, and therefore said nothing about it; but the forebodings of some great misfortune hung about me. With such a reinforcement I feel quite at my ease, and I hope all will pass off well. Don't you believe so too, Mr. M'Donald?"

"Yes, miss—I—hope so," replied the young man, uneasily.

"Then you entertain similar apprehensions?" exclaimed Sarah, quickly, and with an expression of alarm.

"No," replied M'Donald, turning his eyes from the new-comers. "I suppose these men will stop here; shall we go down and have a look at them, Mr. Powell?"

"Certainly. Nguyulloman, send your boy to the house; he shall have meat for both of you, although I am not now inclined to think," he added, with a smile, turning to his party, "that it is from fear that our black neighbors ran away. These fellows are troubled with bad consciences, and they are said to stand in special dread of the black police." Having said this, he descended the hill, followed by the whole of the party.

"Father," said Lisbeth, laughing, and taking his arm, "you should not have let the cripple know that you were not aware of the coming of the black police; just think, how they would stand in awe of you, if they thought that assistance came the moment you required it."

"As you are so wise, my child," replied her father, with a smile, "why did you not give me the hint before? Of course that would have been the most prudent plan."

"It did not strike me before," answered Lisbeth, laughing.

"And that was just the case with me," Mr. Powell observed, gayly.

"You have become very grave, Mr. M'Donald said Sarah, as they descended the hill.

The individual thus addressed was walking

silently at her side. Her mother had hastened into the house, to give out rations for the blacks, who would naturally expect some refreshment.

"Grave! and did you ever see me otherwise?"

"Oo, yes, indeed," answered Sarah, blushing slightly. "When you came here for the first time you were very different—full of spirits and humor, nay, almost to excess."

"We grow older, and gravity comes with years."

"Not with these years, I hope," replied Sarah, with a smile; "that would be too soon, and we must not appear old before our time. But what is the matter with your foot? You are lame. I hope you were not wounded yesterday?" she added, with anxiety.

"No—no," replied the young man, at the same time acknowledging the kind inquiry with a grateful look. "It is only a trifle. As we were riding very fast, I struck my foot against a fallen tree, and now it hurts me. I think there is a boot-store at the station, and a larger pair will soon give me ease."

"By the-by, M'Donald," said Mr. Powell, stopping and turning toward the young man, "I have a favor to ask of you—or rather a proposal, for if you do not like to agree to it, I should not endeavor to persuade you to do so."

"Anything I can do for you—"

"Nay; make no promises beforehand. I only wanted to ask whether you would part with your gray?"

"My gray?"

"I know it is a good horse; but horses change owners, and I will tell you why I want the animal. I have plenty of horses myself; but Mr. Bale lost his yesterday, and I feel convinced that I could not please him better than by giving him the gray. Name your price—that is, if you feel inclined to part with him; I have no doubt we shall easily come to an agreement."

"I think so, too," said M'Donald, smiling. "The gray is a good horse; but I like your bay I rode yesterday and the day before, just as well; and if it suits you, we will make an exchange."

"In that case, you will be the loser by it."

"I do not think so; he jumps beautifully, and is just the sort of horse for the bush. I shall be perfectly satisfied with the exchange."

"Well, if you are, so am I," replied Mr. Powell, "and am, moreover, extremely obliged to you for your kindness. The bay is yours, then, and the gray mine."

"And so the affair is concluded," added M'Donald.

"That is what I call making a bargain quickly," Sarah observed, cheerfully; "and I am sure it will be a great surprise for Mr. Bale."

"I think he is going to his station to-day," said M'Donald.

"To his station? No," replied Mr. Powell: "he is going to look out for some cattle we have long missed the traces of, which one of the cattle-tenders says he discovered lately in the neighborhood. Perhaps he may be fortunate enough to find them at once; perhaps it may take him a whole week. I only detained him in order to speak to you about the horse. It is very possible you may not see your gray for a good while."

"I hope, in that case, the bay will answer my purpose equally as well."

The conversation was here interrupted by the clatter of the hoofs of the horsemen, who were turning round the corner of the fence, just as the two gentlemen reached the open space before the house. At the same time, Miller, Mr. Powell's late hut-keeper, arrived at the station from the opposite side, and approached his master with an embarrassed air. He knew very well that, according to law, and the terms of his agreement, he was not entitled to one penny of his wages, as the value of the sheep lost through his neglect might be deducted therefrom; and he was, moreover, in his master's debt for many little things required in the bush. It depended entirely on Mr. Powell's liberality whether he gave him anything; at any rate, he was firmly resolved not to ask for a farthing.

For the moment the settler's attention was too much attracted by the black cavalry to notice the hut-keeper, who waited at a respectful distance. They were, indeed, a wild troop—the terror of the bush ranger, which each man of the band seemed to know, and of which all were proud enough.

At their head rode a sergeant, a white man, dressed in a sort of blue light dragoon uniform—a short jacket, trowsers with red stripes down the side, a light foraging cap, a saber by his side, pistols in the holsters, and a carbine. He was followed by his black squadron, keeping neither order nor rank, but riding in great confusion. They were about sixteen strong, all dressed alike. A small minority of them seemed to have become so far civilized as to wear a cap: but all stood barefoot in their stirrups. Their long hair streamed wildly over their shoulders, and their large, black, glittering eyes watched everything they saw. Some of them had spurs buckled on their bare feet, while others used a short, strong riding-whip, suspended round the wrist by a leather strap.

Most of the troop had pistols, and all were armed with sabers. The troop looked very curiously as they rode past the forsaken encampment of their countrymen and perceived the forms of the two natives left behind.

The sergeant could easily distinguish the master of the station among the company, and waving his hand to his troop as a signal to halt, he quickly advanced toward Mr. Powell. When within twenty paces, he made a military salute, jumped from his horse, threw the bridle over his arm, and, approaching Mr. Powell—

"I have the honor to speak to Mr. Powell?" he asked, with his hand still touching his cap.

"That is my name.—You and your men are heartily welcome," was the hospitable answer. "I hope you are not engaged in such severe and hasty duty as to be obliged to leave the station immediately."

"Thank you, sir, no; on the contrary, I have orders to encamp in the neighborhood until our lieutenant, who has remained behind, joins us."

"So much the better. Your men shall get what they require; and I suppose it will not be a violation of your duties for you to take up your quarters at my house."

The sergeant acknowledged the hospitable offer with a slight bow.

"What is the name of your officer?"

"Lieutenant Walker."

"Indeed! An old acquaintance, then, if I mistake not. Do you not remember Lieutenant Walker of Sidney," added he, turning to his daughter, "who once accompanied us in a trip to Paramatta?"

"I think I do," replied the beautiful girl, and a slight blush covered her cheeks for an instant; but it disappeared as quickly as it came. "As far as I can remember, he had then just entered the force."

"You are quite right miss," said the sergeant. "He afterward distinguished himself in an affair with a desperate gang of bush rangers, and received a medal and a commission of first lieutenant."

"We shall be glad to have the pleasure of seeing him again," said Mr. Powell. "But pray get your men into their quarters. You seem to have had a long ride; the horses look very tired. May I ask whither you are bound?"

"That is no secret," replied the sergeant. "A small band of bush rangers, in the swamps of the Hindmarsh, under a very enterprising leader, have been committing numerous depredations. We have scattered this band, and taken most of them prisoners. The remainder were driven into the bush, where they were probably surrounded by the white mounted police, and put out of harm's way. Very likely their chief was among them. But some—particularly two, the very worst of criminals, transported for life for the most heinous offenses—fled northward into the bush, and it is possible, although unlikely, that they may cross the desert, and reach the Murray. To prevent that, a reconnaissance has been ordered along the Murray, to put the settlers upon their guard, in case these men should, after all, make their appearance. At present, they are still in the malley-bush, unless the blacks have done us the kindness to rid the colonies of these plagues of human society. Has anything happened about here, sir?"

"We had a slight skirmish yesterday with a gang of blacks, who broke into our yards; but I will tell you all about it presently. Pray see that your men are made comfortable; perhaps they will be able to make use of the camp abandoned by the tribe only this morning; the gunyoes are still there. I fancy your men scared them away."

"Very possibly," replied the sergeant, laughing. "They have a most awful respect for

my black fellows, and generally retire into the bush whenever we come near. I shall avail myself of your kindness."

One of my sons will give you the necessary provision. The blacks have taken care we should have plenty of meat on hand."

"So much the better; at least, we can turn it into account," said the soldier, laughing, and with a polite bow to Mr. Powell and his company, he remounted and returned to his troop, to lead them off to their quarters.

George, who had come to look at the newcomers, at a sign from his father, accompanied them, to show where to put the horses for the night.

As soon as the blacks had seen their steeds properly provided for, they set about preparing their own camp. They made use of the sheets of bark which their countrymen had left behind; but the old encampment did not suit them. Exactly as the wolf-dog would not choose the same spot on which his ancestor, the wolf, had reposed, so did these degenerate, scarcely half-civilized children of the wilderness despise the resting-place of their countrymen; nay, they even moved away with disgust from the remains of the old encampment. They carried the bark some distance from the previous camp; but, on account of the water, close to the river-side.

Strangely enough, the black tribes had no more bitter or dangerous enemies in the whole extent of the Australian continent than this black police. These, however, form no exception to a rule prevalent in all nature, and under the most different conditions. The negro is hated, and whenever opportunity offers, persecuted, by no race so much as by the mulatto, in whose veins the same blood flows; the Christians, descended from the Jews, are almost always the most bitter enemies of the latter; among the heathen tribes, none behave with so much violence and cruelty toward them as those of their own who have been converted. Even in the animal kingdom the same law holds good. The wolf, for instance, has no more terrible enemy than his bastard son, the wolf-dog. Why do things happen thus? Who can tell? Thus it was with these blacks, most of whom had entered the force with no other object than that of getting a horse, arms, and plenty to eat. They were never happier than when let loose upon one of the native tribes; and few white men would have dared to practice such cruelties as these aborigines inflicted upon their fellows.

Engaged as they were, for the present, in a sort of friendly mission—since such a reconnaissance could scarcely be considered anything more than a pleasant trip through the forest—they gave themselves up entirely to that which constitutes a native's highest enjoyment—plenty to eat and nothing to do. As soon as the camp was formed, and fuel had been gathered for the night, part of them sat at the fire, chatting and laughing, while others sauntered about the station, and at last went to Nguyulloman to pay him a visit. Some of them were, no doubt, acquainted with him.

It was curious to see how carefully they noticed everything that came in their way. Not a horse, not a head of cattle, escaped their keen scrutiny. First of all, they invariably examined the "brand," and sometimes compared it with others which they drew upon the sand.

Three or four of them would then gather round such a rough sketch, chattering and gesticulating with the greatest animation, until something else attracted their attention. From old habits, they particularly noticed the various foot-tracks, here crossing each other in all directions, although few of them could be clearly made out. Some they measured with their finger and knuckles; and they were particularly delighted at seeing the small foot-prints made by the ladies.

Nguyulloman received the visit with all the dignity naturally belonging to the sole representative of his tribe. This did not, however, prevent him from begging, without ceremony, some tobacco. To their questions, he only vouchsafed laconic and evasive answers; and when they at last insisted upon knowing where his tribe had gone, he complained bitterly at their leaving him to the mercy of the white man, without even a piece of resin or anything else to eat. Their destination they probably did not know themselves. They might have gone to hunt wallabies; and he declared that he thought it likely they would be back on the morrow or the day after.

One of them invited him to their camp. At first he excused himself, and was only with great difficulty prevailed upon to accept the invitation. It was evidently an effort on his part, and he went very slowly, stopping occasionally and groaning. At last they left him to follow alone, and at his leisure.

These blacks wore the saber as long as they were on duty. Many, no doubt, unaccustomed to its use, found it but an inconvenient weapon, although it flattered their vanity to hear it rattling at their side. Many of them carried for their private use the boomerang—a flat, curved, piece of wood, which returns to the place from which it is thrown. They used this as a weapon in their fights with "rebellious" blacks, as well as in the forest against wallabies and opossums, which the black police pursued with just as much eagerness as they did escaped criminals or dangerous aborigines.

Five or six of them set out to look for some booty of the sort, which they hoped to find in the neighborhood, while others went to the river to fish. It was a curious sight afforded by those dark forms, with their blue jackets and trousers, bare-headed and bare-footed, stealthily and silently standing by the river-side or creeping through the forest, examining the barks of the trees in order to discover traces of opossums, and the ground for the tracks of the wallabies.

The sergeant left his men to their occupations, certain of their obedience. He had only to appoint the time and place for their return, and he was satisfied they would be punctual. Their own natural tendencies would induce them not to let any opportunity slip offered by their leisure to examine everything that occurred in the environs. Like so many well-trained hounds, they scoured the country in all directions, and no foot trace, no cattle with a different brand, escaped their searching eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL.

WHILE the majority of the newly arrived frontier guards was thus occupied, a few of them remained in the camp to examine the arms. They vainly endeavored to extort anything of interest out of Nguyulloman. Either the cripple really was ignorant of the route of his tribe, or he was cunning enough to conceal it. Meanwhile Miller had approached the squatter, and been dismissed from his service.

"Ah! You are the hut-keeper of the dry swamp, are you not?" inquired Mr. Powell, who was too good-natured to receive the man uncourteously. Indeed, he was already sorry at giving his assent to his dismissal.

"I was," replied Miller, quietly; "and I am truly sorry, Mr. Powell, that my negligence should have caused you to suffer a loss."

"Perhaps?"

"After all, if I had been awake," said Miller, with a shrug of his shoulder, "I could have done nothing against the swarm of savages; and perhaps had a spear run through me into the bargain. I admit I am in fault, and I only hope you may be more satisfied with the new man than you have been with me."

"Go to my son," said Mr. Powell, wishing to put an end to the conversation, "and get your wages. You have been with me about ten or twelve months."

"If you deduct the value of the sheep that were lost, there will be little remaining."

"I do not intend to do that. In God's name, receive your wages in full; but at the same time let this be a warning to you to be more careful in the next situation than you have been here. Where do you mean to go?"

"To Adelaide."

"Have you any acquaintances there?"

"Acquaintances? No," replied Miller, in a low voice; "but a family."

"A family!" exclaimed Mr. Powell, with surprise. "Do you really mean to say that you are married?"

"I have a wife and child."

Mr. Powell shook his head.

"And you have been all this time in the bush, and never, at least to my knowledge, have sent them a line, nor received letters from them? I cannot understand that."

"In former times, I should perhaps not have understood it either," replied the German, gloomily; "but here, in the bush, one seems dead to everything else. Perhaps," he added, half aloud, and as if speaking to himself, "I may become another man yet."

The wild and peculiar expression on the countenance of this man as he uttered these words quite struck Mr. Powell.

"Pray, what profession did you follow before you came to Australia?" he inquired. "I believe you have not been many years in the colonies."

Miller smiled bitterly; and after a short pause he said:

"I was a fool not to know when I was well off. I have atoned for my fault; both I and—But these are old stories, and many a one who now lives in the bush in his tattered clothes might tell similar ones."

"Most of us have been thoughtless in youth, and it is well when we let these early follies be a warning to us. I have no intention of dealing severely with you, nor of reproaching you with the past. It is over, and no more need be said about it. Do you intend going to Adelaide alone?"

"I have no choice," replied Miller.

"I do not think there is any danger at present, while the black police are near the river. Even the solitary pedestrian will not be stopped or plundered by a daring tribe. If you are afraid to go, I will not send you away. You can remain here at the station until you find company, or, perhaps, part of the black police will return there. Until then you are my guest, and one of the shepherds shall take you into his hut."

"Mr. Powell," said the German, scarcely able to master his feelings, which seemed to be those of emotion and shame, "I thank you heartily for your friendly offer, but—I must not abuse your kindness. The other men would despise me as a useless hand—the overseer hates me as it is. Accept my most heartfelt thanks for your generosity; be assured I feel your kind treatment of the stranger more deeply than you may perhaps think. I shall never forget it."

He made a movement as if to take his master's hand, but checked himself, saluted him respectfully, and went toward the house to receive his wages. They were at once paid to him by George Powell, and he then went to the store to buy some tobacco, and a pair of new boots, which he required for his long journey.

In the storehouse stood M'Donald, who was also trying on a pair of boots he had just bought.

"They are far too large for you," said the youngest Powell, Ned, who usually managed the concerns of the storehouse and helped his father to keep the books.

"I do not think so," replied the guest. "I like boots to be comfortable, and these fit me."

"They will rub your skin off; you had better take a smaller number."

"No, I shall try these. Ah, Miller, you are going to leave the station?"

"I am. Will you, Mr. Powell, have the kindness to let me have a pound of tobacco, and a pair of good bush-boots?"

"Choose a pair, and here is a pound of tobacco."

"How much is it?"

"You will find the price of every article marked on that board. Can you read?"

"A little," replied Miller, as he stepped up to the board upon which the price of every article was marked.

"Has the ration-wagon gone out?" M'Donald asked the young shopman, while Miller was examining the list of prices.

"No, it will start about noon; but if you have any commission, Mr. Bale is going to ride out, and, if I mistake not, he is saddling his horse."

"Will he pass by the sheep station?"

"Yes; he has just fetched a pound of tobacco for the new hut-keeper."

"It was mere curiosity;—I will, however, see him off. I should like to know how he likes the gray."

"Then you will have to make haste. I do not think he will pass the house. Indeed the boots are too large for you."

"Oh, by no means. They fit me capitally, and are quite comfortable. Well, I shall look out for him."

Miller placed the money for the boots and tobacco on the counter, and was about to say good-by and leave the store-house, when Ned said:

"Do you intend to go down the river?"

"I think so," replied he. "Farewell!"

"Stop, take a glass of something before you go. You will have to walk a good distance before you can get anything." At the same

time he fetched a bottle, and poured out half a tumbler of cogniac.

"Thank you, I never did drink brandy," replied Miller. At the same time, however, he cast a longing glance at the glass in which the dark-brown liquid sparkled most alluringly.

"Well, it won't do you any harm; you have a long journey before you," said the young man, good-naturedly. "I suppose father has paid you?"

"To the last penny. He is a man of honor."

"Well, drink this to his health, then; and I wish you a pleasant and prosperous journey."

Miller approached the table, took the glass, held it for a moment to the light, and drawing a deep sigh, before he set it to his lips, emptied it at one draught.

Ned fancied that Miller's eyes grew moist, as he shook the young man heartily by the hand, and hastily left the station. On arriving at the last fence, where the bush commenced, he stopped, looked back once more, and then proceeded on his long and solitary journey. The bush had scarcely closed upon him, when one of the black police force crept out from a thicket in which he had been concealed, gazed after him, and then carefully examined his foot-marks. This seemed fully to satisfy him, and, without looking back, he struck out on the broad track which led to the station.

Miller had not noticed the fellow, nor would he, in all probability, have paid any attention to him if he had happened to catch a glance of him. Absorbed in his own not very cheerful thoughts, he quietly pursued his journey, until he had arrived at a pretty considerable distance from the station, and reached a small open space commanding a view of the river. Then he threw the small bundle in which he carried some linen and clothes, as well as his woollen blanket, upon the ground, sat down under a gum-tree, and, with his hands folded on his right knee, stared for awhile fixedly and silently before him.

"This must change," he muttered at last. "This sort of life must have an end—for myself, my wife and my child. Good God! to what have I been reduced? A dismissed hut-keeper, owing his wages only to the generosity and pity of a stranger. And my wife! Brought up in splendor and luxury, she is now wasting her life in sorrow and misery in a foreign land! Good God! To what has this accursed drink, and my frightful, horrible recklessness, led me? But it must change—it must."

He buried his face in his hands, and threw himself upon the ground, to cool his burning brow in the sand. In a few minutes he rose again, and pushed the damp hair off his pale face. It seemed as if another and more peaceful spirit had come over him; and tears relieved his heart.

"I will lead a better life," he continued in a low and resolute voice. "It is not yet too late; I may still at least make some amends for my wrongs—my sins. My wife will forgive me; and with the small capital which I can now call my own, I can, I must begin something. I am healthy and strong. I will work; I will employ my mental powers, my physical ones, if that should be necessary. There is always a demand for industrious workmen in Australia; and what others can do, I must. Australia is a young and flourishing country. When, by industry and perseverance, I have again risen to the rank which I have lost, I may return to my native land, to my home.—To my home!" he repeated, sadly; and it seemed as if at the thought of what he had lost—what he had thrown away—a bitter, a deep sorrow seized upon him. But he soon shook it off. Good intentions seemed to give him strength. He wiped the tears from his eyelids, and lifting his pack and blanket from the ground—(his goods and chattles were not heavy to carry)—he resumed his journey through the forest, and with quick and firm steps hastened toward the West, his new goal.

The sergeant had in the meantime obtained from Mr. Powell a list of all his people, with their ages and names. The information, however, led to no satisfactory results. Most of the men had been at the station three or four years, and were well-behaved, honest fellows. The man who had left that very day was a German, going to Adelaide, and Culloch, the sergeant, had seen him himself. Only one new hand was on the station. Mr. Powell knew

nothing about this man, and Mr. Bale who might have given some information, had left on business, and was not expected to return for some days. Mr. Powell recollected that Bale told him Mr. McDonald had met the man before. To the sergeant's inquiries about him, McDonald replied that for some time the man called Toby had been under his orders at a station on the Murray, and that he was satisfied with him. He had been obliged to leave on account of a fight with a shepherd.

"Bah!" exclaimed the sergeant, laughing; "if that is all, there is not much harm"—apparently quite satisfied on the subject. Upon more mature reflection, he nevertheless determined, without saying anything about it, upon sending one of his black fellows to have a look at the man. On the arrival of his lieutenant, he must be prepared to give him a faithful account of everything, and he was accordingly anxious that nothing should be left undone.

The conversation turned upon horses and cattle, the form of the neighboring settlers' brands, which the sergeant carefully noted in his book. Sarah grew tired of this, and walking up to McDonald, who was leaning against the window listening to the conversation, she said:

"If you do not feel a very particular interest in the different brands under discussion, and if, as I hope you are, indifferent whether this or that stray cow has a horn more or less crumpled, and this or that stray horse a larger or smaller white star on the forehead, I shall be obliged if you will accompany me to the river-side. I should like to get personally acquainted with this black police, of which I have heard so many strange adventures. Perhaps 'Lisbeth will go with us?"

"I cannot, Sarah," her sister replied; "you know I am housekeeper this week, and I have so much to do and attend to."

"Well, we must go alone, then," Sarah answered, laughing, and taking hold of the arm gladly offered to her. "With such an escort, I am sure I shall have nothing to fear!"

With an elastic step, the beautiful girl walked by the side of her companion over the open space around the houses. They proceeded in the direction of the camp, where the blacks had again assembled to receive the provisions sent from the station, as well as to prepare the game they had obtained in the chase.

"What a strange people they are!" Sarah remarked, as they walked slowly between the bark huts and the blacks. "They will always be wild as long as they live, in spite of the uniform."

"What astonishes me most," said McDonald, "is, that they cannot consent to confine themselves in these tight clothes. From what I had before seen of them, this seemed to me to be the greatest obstacle to their adopting a civilized sort of life."

"Father has often tried to reclaim them, by giving them good and regular food. I only know of one instance of a black who could be persuaded to keep the sheep three or four months, and at the expiration of that time he gave it up too."

"Still there are black shepherds here and there on the Murray."

"They are exceptions to the general rule, then," replied Sarah. "We once tried it with the girls. We took them quite young, and they offered no objection to being dressed, and they did all their work with great punctuality, but as soon as they had attained a certain age, they could not be restrained, threw off everything we had given them, and returned to the bush, and were never seen again."

They had now passed the camp, and they walked some distance down the river. Sarah looked back toward the blacks.

"Observe how carefully they are examining our tracks," she said, laughing; "they seem to take more interest in our footprints than in our persons."

"They consider us only as game, and nothing better. If they were ever set upon our tracks, for whatever cause, they would follow them with as much eagerness and certainty as the bloodhound does his victim; indeed, man is the most cruel, merciless creature under the sun. The animal at least spares its master, and only kills when in need of prey; but man pursues and kills frequently only for the sake of pleasure—a whim, the excitement of the moment."

"You are certainly right," replied Sarah, with a sigh; "and," she added, with a smile,

"I would not on that very account marry a hunter."

"We are all hunters," replied McDonald, thoughtfully; "some in pursuit of this, some of that—all hunters or prey in this life; and, indeed, it is difficult to distinguish the one from the other."

"Nor do I approve of what people call chasing in another sense," said Sarah. "In the colonies in particular, men are always in eager pursuit of gain, and nothing else; they neither care for life nor health, so that their flocks and herds increase. Capital produces capital, and purse and coffers are filled. And with very little could we, if we chose, be happy! All we want is to reach a step upon the ladder higher than that on which God has placed us. And how very unjustly we act in doing this. I, for instance, could be happy with so little."

"And are you not happy, Miss Sarah?" asked McDonald. "Do you not find in your family all that the heart of a child can want?"

"I will not be unjust, and fall into the failing which I have just censured," Sarah answered, with a smile. "Yes, I am happy now—at least I should consider it a sin to say I wanted anything; but I feel uneasy that father should have come to such a wilderness only to procure wealth for his children. I am uneasy that my brothers should not learn what civilization requires, and that which their eager mind is so fit to receive. I am, moreover, uneasy that daily they should be exposed to one danger or another, when, with more moderate wants, we might live so quietly and peaceably on some smaller estate in our own home, to which our hearts cling, after all."

During this conversation, they reached the bank of the river, perhaps three hundred paces distant from the camp of the blacks.

"What a beautiful scene!" exclaimed McDonald, as they lingered at this lovely spot and contemplated it for a few minutes. "How happily might life pass away in peace and quietness, if we were permitted to find peace and quietness in this world."

The last words were uttered in a low and scarcely audible voice, and a deep sigh relieved his oppressed heart. Sarah looked at him with a feeling of anxiety, and as he continued with downcast eyes, silently, as in a dream, regarding the ground, she let go his arm, the better to gaze into his face, and said:

"What ails you, Mr. McDonald? We are strangers to each other, it is true, at least according to the usages of cold, social life; but you know—you must feel—that we all of us take the most lively interest in you. If there is anything in which my father—in which we can—assist you, you may rely upon it that we shall not only be willing, but even eager to do so."

"I thank you, Miss Sarah! I thank you from the bottom of my heart, for the feeling of friendship which prompts you," answered McDonald, with a hasty effort to collect himself, as if ashamed of having given vent to his feelings. "Every one in this world has to bear his little burdens; some more, some less; and every one foolishly fancies his to be the heaviest."

"You do not appear to be a person likely to exaggerate the importance of yours," Sarah replied, in an earnest, almost anxious tone.

"Do not rely too much upon that," continued McDonald, with a smile intended to dissipate her fears, but which only increased them. "I am, perhaps, weaker than you think."

"I have no right to thrust myself into your confidence," said Sarah, in a low voice; "and still, I know no one I should like better—" She suddenly checked herself, with a blush, and turned toward some screaming cockatoos, that were just flying over their heads toward the river.

"Would you trust me?" asked McDonald, seizing her hand, which she gave to him, trembling violently. "Me—a stranger! What if I myself cautioned you against so doing?"

"I should not heed you," said Sarah, with a smile, while two bright tears appeared in her eyelashes, "not more now than before."

"You may believe me, Sarah, when I appear as my own accuser," observed McDonald, suddenly, as if seized with deep emotion; "but believe not others when they do so. Keep fast a little of that trust which you put in me, perhaps too rashly. Let me depart hence with the conviction that there is one being in the wide world who takes an interest in me, who thinks of me with a feeling of friendship."

So deep a grief was depicted upon his features as he uttered these words, with almost painful haste, that Sarah, struck with his unexpected emotion, remained silent. Suddenly the sound of hoofs was heard in the bush.

Both looked round, and M'Donald unconsciously let go Sarah's hand. The horseman advanced toward them, and scarcely half a minute after he reached the spot where they were stopped, and casting a sharp, searching look upon M'Donald, as if his presence was not agreeable to him, said, bowing to Sarah with a friendly smile:

"I saw your dress through the bushes, miss, and thank my lucky star which guided me first to you. I cannot but consider it as a good omen."

With these words he vaulted lightly out of the saddle, gave the reins to one of the black police who had hastened to the spot, without however honoring him with a look, and advanced toward the young lady with outstretched hands.

Sarah blushed and shook hands without, however, speaking a word; and the new-comer continued, laughing:

"Indeed, I do not know whether you recognize me. Since I had the pleasure of seeing you seems to me an age, although it is scarcely more than three years."

"Lieutenant Walker must think my memory very bad," Sarah replied, in a friendly but reserved tone, "if he supposes that short time could have entirely effaced his name from my recollection."

"Had the separation lasted much longer, you could not have answered for the result?" said the officer laughing.

"I do not think you know each other," Sarah replied. "Mr. Lieutenant Walker, and, if I mistake not, chief of the black mounted police." The lieutenant bowed, coldly, but politely. "Mr. M'Donald, a friend of ours who surprised us a few days ago by a visit."

M'Donald returned the bow, and the young officer continued, addressing Sarah in a lively manner:

"You cannot conceive, miss, with what delight I received orders to lead a troop in this direction, and I should certainly have hastened on before my wild set, had not a disagreeable duty detained me at the last station for several hours."

"My father will be very glad to see you again," said Sarah, "and, if you have no objection, I will go with you."

"I am ready to follow you whenever you please; but may I venture to offer you my arm over the rough ground?"

"I thank you," said Sarah, in a friendly tone, refusing the proffered assistance; "I know every root here. There comes my father, he has no doubt heard of your arrival. If you will allow me I will go and prepare everything for your reception;" and with this she quitted the two gentlemen and hastened toward the house.

Mr. Powell had indeed been apprised of the arrival of his guest, and was coming to welcome him. They walked toward the house, but M'Donald remained alone by the river-side and, with his arms folded over his breast, leaning against a slender gum-tree, he gazed in silence at the water which flowed at his feet.

CHAPTER X.

THE LIEUTENANT OF THE MOUNTED POLICE. LIEUTENANT WALKER was a young man of about seven-and-twenty years of age, with a slender but strong and well-knit frame. For a young man, he possessed an extraordinary amount of experience. Born of poor parents, and with little prospect of making his way in the old country, he had emigrated to Australia and entered the force as a private.

In those troubled times, he soon distinguished himself; and his coolness and courage attracted the notice of his chiefs. In a fight with the bush rangers, who had assembled in New South Wales in dangerous bands, his superior officer was killed. Walker assumed the command, and without further orders, conducted the expedition in which they were engaged with so much skill and success, that the Governor appointed him second lieutenant.

A bold stroke, already alluded to, which he executed with a few of his men, against a band of well-armed escaped convicts, obtained for him the medal and the commission of first lieutenant. When the black police was formed, he received the command of a troop of these fellows ordered to clear the western frontiers.

Only a few years before, he had made the acquaintance of the Powells at Sydney; and even then the budding bush-rose Sarah, made a deep impression upon him. At that time, indeed, his position was too humble to permit him to address the young lady, as he was but just commencing his career. But three eventful years, rich in success for him, had since elapsed. His pay had increased considerably; he occupied a highly respectable position, and might aspire to the hand of the daughter of even a wealthy planter. He fancied that Sarah was not indifferent to him; and with the love of the daughter and the good-will of the father, he doubted not of ultimate success.

Who could the stranger be with whom he had found her by the river side? That one circumstance rendered him uneasy. However, to inquire was his profession; and he hoped soon to obtain from Mr. Powell all necessary information on this point.

"A friend of the house," Sarah had told him. "Bah! Friends of the house are seldom dangerous!" And by a bold attack he still hoped to obtain his end. The time was short, however. His orders were precise. He must try and find out who this stranger was, and in what relation he stood to the family; and then all would be smooth.

"I am heartily rejoiced, my dear Mr. Walker," said Mr. Powell as they walked toward the house, "to see you and bid you welcome."

"I promised to come and see you on the Murray."

"Yes," replied the old gentleman, "I know you did; but such promises are constantly made, no doubt sincerely, but circumstances prevent their fulfillment. We are all dependent upon them, and cannot always follow our inclinations. It is, therefore, so much the more delightful when these can be combined with our duties."

"In the wild and adventurous life which we lead," replied the lieutenant, laughing, "everything is possible, and no part of the colonies is safe from our excursions. To-day we are here, to-morrow there; and the 'game' which we have to follow takes good care to keep us in motion. On the whole, from what I heard, I thought your station much more lonely."

"Your men have brought life into it," replied Mr. Powell, with a smile; "for usually it is indeed still and lonely enough here, and I really sometimes pity my poor girls, who are deprived in the bush of almost all the pleasures of youth."

"But you have frequent visitors?"

"Not many. Most strangers going this way are not of a character to hold much intercourse with."

"I know the fellows well enough," said Walker. "Nine-tenths of them are liberated convicts, and the remaining tenth little better. These fellows wander far and wide. Indeed, the police stations along the Murray ought to be much more numerous than they are, if it were only on their account."

"Nevertheless, we very seldom hear of any robbery or burglary. Most crimes of the sort are committed by the blacks."

"You had a skirmish with them yesterday?" asked Walker.

"I am sorry to say we had," replied Mr. Powell. "It always grieves me to see the poor wretches roughly treated. We apply our standard of right and justice to them, and the poor devils invariably get the worst of it."

"They fare worse when I set my blacks at them," said Walker, laughing, and stopping to look back at his troop. "But, speaking of guests, the gentleman whom I met by the river-side with Miss Sarah seems to have stayed behind. Is he a relation of yours?"

"No; he is a friend of ours, who visited us once before, about a year ago, and for whom we all have taken a great liking. His name is M'Donald."

"M'Donald? This name is frequently met with in the old country. You do not happen to know from what part of the world he comes?"

"No; he never mentions his family, and I have not asked him any questions on that point."

"In the colonies," said Walker, laughing, "one soon acquires the habit of not touching upon the past of our neighbors, even with the safest people. I suppose he has a station here in the West?"

"He has not yet taken one; but is looking out for a suitable run."

"God be thanked!" thought Walker, within himself; "only a passing acquaintance, which will not prove very dangerous."

The two gentlemen entered the house together, and Walker was most warmly welcomed by Mrs. Powell and Elizabeth. Many a pleasant recollection of the busy life in the metropolis was revived by his presence; and he could also give them information about many persons who were dear to them.

Walker, having been accustomed from his youth to mingle with society, and forced by his profession to mix alternately with all ranks, at once made himself at home at Mr. Powell's. Before the evening closed, he had become as free and sociable with them all as if he had belonged for many years to the family.

Toward evening, his duties called him away from the family circle; and he had a long conversation with the sergeant about instructions concerning the movements of his troop and his own designs, which he had not as yet communicated to the family.

The sergeant, in the first place, gave his commanding officer an account of all that he had observed on his way, referring chiefly to the people engaged at the station. Information was easily and quickly obtained by means of a list which the sergeant had procured from the bookkeeper. It contained the names and ages of all those persons who had been in service there. Walker himself met the dismissed hut-keeper on his way to the station.

The only stranger, therefore, at the station was the hut-keeper engaged in the place of Miller. The sergeant had already sent one of his black troop to obtain all the necessary information concerning this man. It was not impossible that he belonged to the band which had been scattered in the marshes, and might have made his way to this place. At any rate, the black police had come to the Murray for the purpose of searching the whole country; and it was a part of their duty not to leave any stranger unnoticed.

"Very well," said Walker, after hearing the report; "we must wait for your messenger, and, as soon as he comes, you will break up with the troop, and march to the Darling. Midway, you can stop a day to search the country, and I will overtake you on the Darling. Four of the men can stay here with me."

"You have not heard yet, sir," asked the sergeant, "what has become of our best prey. Has he been caught?"

"I think he has," said Walker; "at least, such was the report a short time since: I shall hear more about this matter either to-day or to-morrow. I left my servant at the last station, that we might receive the letter as soon as possible."

"I should be sorry to lose the reward," observed the sergeant, with vexation; "we always have the hardest work first, and those who come after us have nothing to do but skim the cream off the milk. I thought that we should make nothing of it."

"It matters little so that he is caught," said Walker, shrugging his shoulders. "However, we may make some prize money, after all. I should not be surprised if that new hut-keeper turned out to be that rascal, 'Red John,' as the bush rangers call him; and there is a reward of £100 on his head too. At any rate he has a gun."

"The deuce!" exclaimed the astonished sergeant; "how did you learn that?"

"The German I met as I was coming to the station, and who held the situation before, told me so."

"He has a spite against him, then," said the sergeant, with a shrug of his shoulders. "It cannot be 'Red John.' He has lived in the woods several years now, and the gentleman who is here, M'Donald, knew this fellow at a station on the Murray."

"Be that as it may," answered Walker, "this Red John is still at large, and, to all appearances, has fled to the Murray. If we once get upon his tracks, he will not be able to escape. At any rate, the game is surrounded; and wherever we find this fellow, a few of his former comrades will turn up at the same time."

"So much the better, and welcome too," replied the sergeant. "My blacks long for something to do."

"By-the-by," said Walker, as he was about to break up the conference, "where did the tribe that was encamped here yesterday go to? I suppose you have sent to ascertain?"

"Certainly. They crossed the river, and kept to the bush for some distance; but they afterward turned and crossed the river again, higher up, no doubt to form a junction with the band who carried off the sheep a few days since."

"I thought so. I saw their tracks about four miles off, although they had all jumped over their path. But they left a spy behind."

"He can scarce be called a spy—a poor devil of a cripple, with legs like a skeleton's which he cannot use. Very likely they suddenly got wind of our coming, and could not take him away with them. He is still yonder."

"Very well. As soon as your messenger returns from the sheep-station, let me know. Whom have you sent?"

"Kuyunko. He is acquainted with most of these fellows, as he belongs to a tribe with which they had formerly a great deal of intercourse."

The following morning all was much life and bustle among the black police. All the band, with the exception of four, fetched their horses, saddled them, and prepared for the march. One of the troop, whom Walker had left behind, had arrived at full speed with dispatches, and the lieutenant was standing by the sergeant, giving his orders, when M'Donald approached.

"Are you going to leave us already?" he asked, bowing to the young officer.

"Our life is one of motion," answered the latter. "There is no rest for us; and whenever we are comfortable at a place, we are sure to be called away."

"You have received dispatches, I see," said M'Donald.

"A fresh start," replied Walker. "I have now been a hunter of men for seven years."

"It is a noble pursuit," observed M'Donald, with a smile.

"Noble!" exclaimed the lieutenant, with an expression of contempt. "If you understood it as well as I do, you would not thus misuse the word 'noble.'"

"Is there not one good man among them?" asked M'Donald, with a smile. "You gentlemen of the police are too prone to consider every one a rascal who has not proved himself to be an honest man."

"When one comes constantly in contact with the refuse of society—sees nothing but depravity—the most generous mind must, at last, despair of humanity," said the lieutenant. "Even now, scarcely fifteen miles from here, an abominable and horrible murder has been committed."

"A murder!" exclaimed M'Donald, with horror.

"Attended with circumstances of the most horrid barbarity," continued the officer. "My man has just brought me the news. A traveler coming from Darling has been killed in the bend of the Murray, and not by blacks, but by a white man."

"Have you any suspicion of the direction taken by the murderer?"

"Suspicion?" answered Walker, with an expression of astonishment. "What do I care about suspicion? I shall set six of my bloodhounds on the tracks, and it will be very hard, indeed, if we do not catch him within a few days. My messenger could not stop, I am sorry to say. A few wild dogs attracted his attention, as he was passing, and he found a body concealed with considerable care under branches and bark."

"But what makes you suppose that a white man committed the murder?"

"For the simplest reasons. In the first place, the wound was inflicted with a broad knife, such as no blacks carry, and the murderer has taken away his victim's money and boots, leaving his own boots instead."

"I cannot conceive why he did not throw them all into the river," said M'Donald. "At any rate, he must have been an inexperienced hand."

"I do not think so," replied Walker. "The river is several miles distant from the place where the deed was committed, and he would have left more tracks if he had carried the corpse to it, than by concealing it. Had the body remained undiscovered only two days longer, the wild dogs would have mangled it in such a way that no one could have recognized it. Indeed, the murderer's principal aim seems to have been to get away as quickly as possible. He evidently had no fear of discovery, as he did not know that the black police were so

close upon his heels. I will have the fellow hanged, if I should be obliged to follow his tracks for half a year in the bush, in order to accomplish my object. It is the punishment he deserves, and I hold it a point of honor not to leave unavenged a murder committed under the very eyes of the police."

"I hope you will discover the murderer," said M'Donald, "the safety of all is endangered when such wretches are allowed to roam about at liberty."

M'Donald perceived that the lieutenant was pressed for time, and wished to be rid of the presence of a stranger; he therefore walked toward the house, passing a group of blacks, lounging about. M'Donald was not wrong in his surmises. The lieutenant had many things to settle with his sergeant, who received his orders, and soon after rode up the river, accompanied by six of his men. Another party were ordered in an opposite direction, and a few went into the bush.

As Kuyunko, who had been ordered to the sheep-station, had not returned, two men were sent after him. The officer remained alone at the station, and he retired to his room, and spent about an hour writing. When he had done, he went to the parlor to look after Mr. Powell.

Sarah's voice answered his knock, and, on opening the door, he found her alone in the room.

"Excuse my disturbing you, Miss Sarah," said the young officer, casting a hasty glance round the apartment. "I wanted to see your father."

"He went out about half an hour ago, with mother and Elizabeth, to the new paddock," replied Sarah. "Mr. Bale, I hear, has returned with some cattle which had long been missed. He accidentally found them in the bush, much quicker than was expected, and father went to look at them. You will be sure to find them there."

Walker stood at the door irresolute, as if undecided whether to go or stay. Convinced that this favorable opportunity would probably never recur, that, in a day or two, he might be far away, he turned slowly away from the door, and said, with a trembling voice:

"If you will allow me, Miss Sarah, I will wait for him here. Who knows what long expeditions I may soon have to undertake? A short rest before coming hardships will do me good."

Sarah bowed to him; she wished to answer, but could not utter a word.

It often happens in life, that when some important event is impending, the presentiment entirely takes possession of our minds. Our heart is oppressed, we know not why; our pulse ceases to beat; we can scarcely breathe; and the mind must, at last, make a violent effort to regain its ascendancy over the body.

So felt these young people, as they stood together alone. They knew that this moment was decisive for them. Sarah perceived the impression she had made, although quite unwillingly, upon the mind of the young officer, and Walker, who loved the young and beautiful girl with all the ardor of a first attachment, had not relinquished the hope of calling her his own, notwithstanding the reserve of her manners. This he considered to be maiden bashfulness. The decisive moment had arrived. The next day might, perhaps, separate them for months, if not for years. He resolved, at least, to know for certain whether his hopes and dreams had any chance of being realized, or whether he should have to relinquish in despair the hope of winning the heart of the beautiful maiden.

Sarah soon grew collected. She was determined not to let her guest suspect what was going on in her bosom; and, making a violent effort to master her emotion, perhaps also anxious to give him time to speak to her, she took up her bonnet, and said, in a friendly manner:

"If you have no objection, I will conduct you to them. I wish to speak to my mother about something."

She was about to pass their guest, in order to gain the door; her hand was already upon the latch. Once out, she thought she was safe.

"Miss Sarah!" exclaimed Walker, mustering all his courage. "Will you allow me to speak a few words with you?"

While uttering these words he endeavored to take her hand, but she hastily withdrew it. He pointed to a chair, with an imploring glance, as if entreating her not by flight to de-

prive him of the opportunity of explaining himself.

Sarah hesitated an instant; but she felt she could not possibly refuse to listen. Her knees almost forsook her, and she sunk upon the nearest chair, saying, in a whisper:

"What do you wish to say?"

Her timidity gave him courage, and in a quiet, firm voice, he continued:

"Miss Sarah, you surely cannot be ignorant that your image is deeply engraven upon my heart—that it has been so from the first moment that I saw you. I beg of you not to interrupt me; at least, allow me to express the feelings which have possessed my soul for years, and sometimes filled it with joyful hopes, sometimes with apprehensive doubts. I love you—love you with all the true and sincere ardor that a man is capable of; and upon your decision, whether favorable or otherwise, depends, perhaps, the happiness of all my future life. As regards myself I shall be obliged, for some years to come, to follow the wild, adventurous life which I have chosen for my profession. But if fortune favors me ever so little—zeal and perseverance I will call to its aid—I shall soon obtain promotion which will not only render me independent, in a pecuniary point of view, but permit of my settling in a town—perhaps at Sydney. Give me your hand, then—trust me with the happiness, the peace of your future life, assured that no one would guard it more tenderly or devotedly than I will. I am the descendant of no noble family," he continued, in a hearty, open voice. "What I am, what I have, I owe only to my own exertions. If you will throw into the balance my heartfelt, ardent love for you, let me at least hope that, when I return to you, I may expect a friendly welcome. I have taken you by surprise," he added, before she could reply; "my bold offer has come upon you in too unexpected a manner. You want time; you wish to consider. Pray be not angry at the hasty manner in which I have spoken. You must remember that I was forced to do so by circumstances. To-morrow morning let me hear a 'Yes' or a 'No' from your eyes."

With this he rose hastily, took his cap, and was about to leave the room, when Sarah stopped him. She could not speak at first; her tongue refused its office, and only her outstretched arm, her entreating, anxious look, bade him stay; and, silent, and trembling with expectation, he obeyed.

At last she recovered enough to be able to speak; and, as she regained motion and life, her self-possession and tranquillity returned, although her cheeks were deadly pale.

"Mr. Walker," she at length ejaculated, "you have, indeed—you have surprised me by this unexpected offer, but—do not go away. Let us at once fully understand each other. You do me honor by this offer; you are, from general report, an honorable, upright man, and—my wants, as regards life, are modest enough—but—"

"Miss Sarah!"

"I can never be yours."

Walker did not reply. For several minutes he stood before her, gravely and in silence, with pale, trembling lips. At last he whispered:

"May I ask why?"

"It is my duty to tell you," replied Sarah. "You opened your heart to me in all sincerity, and I shall do the same to you. I love another."

"You love!" exclaimed the lieutenant, in fearful emotion, "and he—but, no," interrupting himself, "I have no right to question you any more, and ought to feel obliged to you for having been so candid with me. May you be happy, miss; may your husband be worthy of your choice! God is my witness that, although I had my own happiness in view when I solicited your hand, I would not purchase that happiness by causing you one single hour of sorrow."

"Mr. Walker," said Sarah, with emotion.

"It is past," replied the young man; "my dream is over. I once hoped to be allowed to protect your beloved head from all danger—to smooth your path through life. It is not destined to be so; and I think I know the happy man to whom the blissful and glorious lot has fallen. That you may never repent your choice is my most sincere wish; but," he added, in a low voice, trembling with emotion, "woe to the man, if he should deceive you!" He remained silent a few moments, and hav-

ing gained a complete mastery over his feelings, he at last continued, in a perfectly tranquil, unimpassioned voice:

"My duty compels me to spend this day here. This evening, or early to-morrow morning, I expect some of my men, who are gone in pursuit of a murderer, to return. I cannot avoid being near you during this time; but not a word, not a look from me, shall remind you of this hour. Early to-morrow I shall depart; forget, at least, until then, Miss Sarah, that in my heart I have indulged such bold hopes."

Sarah was about to make some reply, but he stretched out his hand to her, opened the door, closed it hastily, and almost uttered a cry of surprise, for at two paces from the door stood M'Donald. Before he could say a word the stranger bowed, and walked down the narrow passage which led to his room.

The lieutenant remained fixed to the spot, and stared after M'Donald as if he had been an apparition. Had he just entered the house, or had he overheard his conversation with Sarah? Had he witnessed it? His blood flowed back to his heart, and he made a movement as if to follow the stranger; but he only entertained this thought an instant. The next minute he turned away, went out of the house, and jumped on his horse, which had been waiting for him, and dashed into the bush.

M'Donald retired into his own room, shut the door after him, took a chair, and sat some minutes with his face buried in his hands. No sigh escaped from his breast, nor a word came from his lips; no motion of his body betrayed that he was alive. It was only when he heard the family returning home that he arose, strode hastily up and down the room with his arms folded across his breast, and as if prompted by a sudden impulse, took his saddle bag and packed it for a journey. He inspected his fire arms, drew the old charges out of his pistols, and cleaned and loaded them again. Then, dressed as he was, he threw himself upon his bed, to follow his own thoughts quietly and undisturbedly until he should be called to join the family circle.

CHAPTER XI.

WALKER AND M'DONALD.

MEANTIME Lieutenant Walker had ridden into the bush at full speed. Whither, he scarcely knew himself, and only wished to collect his thoughts—to regain his coolness and self-possession, before returning to the family circle, in which he felt that he would have to leave his heart. The thought of flight occurred to him—never, never more to see her, whom he could not hope to call his own; but, on reflection, he felt that such a course would not do. The stranger must have heard Sarah's refusal of his hand, for the thin partition could not have prevented this, and to him he must show in what manner he quitted the field.

The quick ride exercised a wonderful influence upon Walker, who naturally possessed great firmness, and always met the blows of destiny with coolness. He had just turned his horse's head in the direction of the station, when the animal pricked its ears, and gave a loud and shrill neigh. Another horse, not far in the bush, answered, and immediately after one of his messengers returned on his jaded steed, through the rustling malley-bush, while the black fellow, who had been in the saddle since morning, gave a shout of joy at recognizing his officer.

"Well, how do you get on?" Have you discovered him?" exclaimed Walker, quickly turning his horse round.

"Kuyunko has!" the black replied, in gloomy voice.

"Then, this new hut-keeper was really the murderer?"

The black simply nodded with his head.

"You followed his track?"

"Step by step. New boots make deep tracks."

"And you found?"

"Kuyunko dead—white man away—but blood in his track. Kuyunko fired."

"Kuyunko dead?" exclaimed the officer with dismay, "but you followed the track?"

"Certainly, as far as the river. Much blood there—swam over, found blood on the other side, but not further—must lie at the bottom. Officer must go with us now. Black police must seek the body; perhaps it is worth gold."

"You are right," said Walker, evidently disturbed, for he had scarcely heard the last words. "We must know who the murderer

was; perhaps there is a price set upon his head. Has nobody seen him?" he suddenly asked, as if a new thought had struck him.

"No—not seen," was the reply.

"Have you no idea who it can be?"

"Red John," replied the black, coolly, and without moving a feature.

Walker stopped his horse so suddenly that it reared high in the air.

"Red John!" he exclaimed, scarcely noticing the prancing and leaping charger under him!—Was Kuyunko still alive?"

"No—dead, but Red John's boots stood by the first corpse, and black man needs no more."

"The boots—true. Who knew the track?"

"Mahong," replied he.

"Where is the sergeant?" the lieutenant asked, hastily.

"Yonder, by the river. Blacks look for the corpse. Officer is to come and give further orders."

"How far is it from here?"

"Five—six miles! River makes great bend yonder."

"Come first to the house, then," said Walker.

"Your horse wants rest, and I myself must speak with some one there before I can follow you."

He slowly turned his horse's head toward the station, the direction of which was already indicated by the cracking of the heavy stock-whips. Mahong followed, perfectly indifferent as to what further orders the lieutenant might give.

When they arrived at the fence, where the men were still busy separating the wild cattle, and marking those which were not branded, Walker reined in his animal. At the corner of the fence stood Mr. Powell, with his overseer, Mr. Bale. The ladies were already on their way home.

"Gentlemen," said Walker, "I am sorry to have to announce to you that your new hut-keeper has already left his post."

"The deuce he has!" exclaimed Bale. "Then I wish the fellow were hanged. I have just brought him a pound of tobacco."

"He must be caught, however, before being hanged," replied Walker, smiling. "I am afraid he is drowned."

"Drowned! at the station?" said Bale with a loud laugh. "Why we are obliged to carry the water up to it in pails."

"Nevertheless, he has been drowned in the river. But you ought to be glad to have got rid of him. He was one of the most noted and dangerous bush rangers, and but a few days ago murdered a man."

"That is not bad!" exclaimed Mr. Powell; "and we may thank God we are delivered of this dangerous man in this manner."

"I always thought the fellow was not altogether right," said Bale; "but how in the world did you come on his track so soon?"

The officer did not reply immediately, for his attention was suddenly attracted to the horses tied up against the malley-bush; he rode up to them, and examined them with the eyes of a judge.

"A capital pair of horses, this," he said, fixing his eyes on the gray. "Bred here?"

"The bay was," answered Bale, walking up to him, for every squatter is fond of having his horses praised. "The gray comes from the south."

"Does the animal belong to you?"

"Yes—a present from Mr. Powell. Mr. M'Donald brought him from the settlements."

"Mr. M'Donald!—Indeed? There is an 'R. L.' on the haunch, isn't there?"

"Yes: but I do not know the brand; it does not belong to any person in these parts."

"I once had a horse very much like this animal," said Walker, still looking at it. "It was shot under me by a bush ranger, and I have not had a better one since. You do not know, perhaps, how much Mr. M'Donald paid for him?"

"Fifteen pounds, including saddle and bridle, he says."

"Fifteen pounds?" exclaimed the officer, quickly turning round.

"Well, it is not so very cheap," replied the overseer, "and in my opinion a very fair price."

"But how very pale you look to-day, Mr. Walker?" said Mr. Powell, interrupting the conversation, and laying his hand on the officer's knee. "I did not notice it so much before. Are you unwell?"

"Quite well, thank you," replied Walker, whose cheeks assumed some color at this

question. In fact, he wanted air, and almost unconsciously he touched his horse's flanks with his sharp spurs. The animal became restive, and required his attention for a few moments; when he had quieted it, he dismounted, threw the bridle over its neck, and was going to lead it into the inclosure. Bale, however, would not suffer him to do this, but took the horse by the bridle and said:

"You will not want it again this evening?"

"No, but early to-morrow morning."

"Very well; then I will take care of the animal. But, the deuce! if what you say about the hut-keeper be correct, I must ride out this very evening."

"You need not be uneasy," said Walker.

"There is no necessity for your doing so this evening. My men will keep watch. It will be time enough to-morrow morning."

"But how did you come on the track; how has all this happened?" asked Mr. Powell.

"I cannot exactly tell you that myself," replied Walker, evasively. "The information I have from my messenger is very explicit; but to-morrow morning you shall know all the details. It will be best, however, not to say anything of the matter to the ladies to-day."

"The danger, thanks to your timely aid, is past," said Mr. Powell; "and I myself think it will be best not to mention anything about it, until we have full details of the affair. But come, our work is done, and we will return to the house."

Taking Walker by the arm, Mr. Powell accompanied him along the fence, when the black messenger met them, probably to receive further instructions from his superior. As soon as the latter saw him, he left Mr. Powell, who slowly continued his way to the house, whispered a few words into his ear, which the black answered with a nod, and Walker then followed his host.

Walker was once more perfectly collected. But as he stepped over the threshold, where all his hopes and dreams had been destroyed, he felt as if he could scarcely master the fearful emotions which had taken possession of his soul. Although he forced his features into their wonted calmness, he looked deadly pale, and his heart beat almost audibly.

It was twilight, but his altered appearance did not escape the sagacity of Mrs. Powell; and as soon as he stepped into the room, she looked at him with astonishment, and said anxiously:

"For God's sake tell me what has happened to you: are you ill, Mr. Walker?"

"You look like a corpse," said Lisbeth, who stood by the window, engaged in earnest conversation with M'Donald, and who now advanced toward him. "Has anything happened?"

"Pray do not be uneasy on my account," replied the young man, laughing, at the same time making a violent effort to collect himself. "I am afraid I exerted myself a little too much last week, and I had a violent headache this afternoon. But it is quite well now, and to-morrow I hope to be as fresh and jovial as ever."

M'Donald fixed a long and searching look upon him, but cast down his eyes as they met those of the officer, and, with a sigh, he turned toward the window. The black soldier was just coming toward the house; he glanced at the stranger, and disappeared through the door.

"Mr. Walker has his head full of business," said Mr. Powell; "so you must make some allowance for him. When he has rested he will feel more comfortable and be better. But come, Sarah, play us something till light and supper are brought in. You like music, Mr. Walker?"

"Very much," replied the young man; "it is one of the pleasures that we poor bushmen are deprived of almost the whole year, and we enjoy it the more when an opportunity offers."

"It is a painful rather than a pleasurable feeling," observed M'Donald.

"Then you do not like music?" asked Mrs. Powell, with an expression of surprise.

"Do not misconstrue my meaning," said M'Donald. "Perhaps no one likes music better than I. It is a pleasure that has long been denied me; and when, after a dreary interval, I am greeted with it, my whole youth lies before me, as in a smiling spring, and my heart seems as if it would burst with sadness and bliss."

While M'Donald was thus speaking, Walker looked sternly at him. When Sarah, without

replying, sat down to the piano, and played national Scotch tunes, he went to the nearest window and took up a book, of which he mechanically turned over the leaves while he was listening to the soft, beloved tones.

It was too dark to read; nevertheless, the book soon attracted his attention. It was the copy of "Lalla Rookh," and his finger accidentally touched the hole made by the bullet, which he carefully and curiously examined. It almost made him forget the music.

"Play something more cheerful," said Mrs. Powell to her daughter. "Your 'Home, sweet home,' awakens in all our hearts too many sad recollections; just listen—how still everything is in the room!"

"You will spoil your eyes, Mr. Walker," said Ned, the youngest boy, who was standing by the window near the lieutenant. "When I read of an evening, mother always tells me not to do so."

"I am not reading," said Walker, as Sarah commenced another and more lively tune: "my attention has only been absorbed by the book because there is a place upon it where a bullet has struck it. Have the bush rangers ever fired into your room, Mr. Powell?"

"The book belongs to M'Donald," exclaimed Lisbeth. "His pistol went off as he was riding on horseback, and fortunately into the saddle-bag."

"In which he carried books?" asked the lieutenant, quickly.

"Yes; was it not fortunate?" answered the young girl, with a laugh.

Sarah touched the keys more rapidly, and played one of those old Scotch tunes of wonderful richness and melody.

"The pistol, fortunately, had a small charge," said Walker, putting down the book, "or the bullet would have penetrated further. After all, our life often hangs by a single hair; and it is well for us that we cannot lift the veil from the future."

The servants, who now entered the room to lay the cloth, interrupted the conversation and the music. Lights were brought in, although twilight had not faded; and the family, with the two guests, sat around the well-spread table.

The conversation turned upon different topics, and George, who arrived late, having been detained by the cattle just recovered, had a good deal to say to his father. Moreover, the catarrh had broken out at one of the out-stations. One of the shepherds had just arrived with the intelligence, and measures were to be taken to remedy it as soon as possible.

When the cloth had been removed, Mr. Powell sent his youngest son for Mr. Bale, as he wished to give him some orders. As the boy opened the door, one of the black soldiers stood before it, and said that he wanted to speak to his officer. Walker rose immediately, but returned in half a minute, and approached the two young ladies, who were standing near the piano, conversing with M'Donald.

M'Donald was in better spirits than usual. Even Mr. Powell, in spite of the many matters that occupied his thoughts, did not fail to notice this favorable change in his guest.

"Well, have you caught him?" he asked, drawing nearer to Walker.

"Whom, father?" asked Lisbeth. "Has anything happened?"

"Happened!" repeated Mr. Powell, laughing. "Mr. Walker and his men are taking away my hut-keeper. He does not trouble himself about what is to become of my cattle."

"Your hut keeper?" said M'Donald, unable to conceal the interest he felt in the affair.

"Yes; in that disguise," replied Walker, smiling, "one of the most noted bush rangers sought to conceal himself. Luckily, my man came upon his track: it is the so-called 'Red John.' Did you ever hear of him, Mr. M'Donald?"

"Certainly. And you have caught him?"

"At least made him harmless."

"Good God, Mr. Powell!" exclaimed Mrs. Powell. "Was I not right, then, in saying we were surrounded by dangers? One of the most notorious bush rangers on the very station, and blacks enough to attack us any day they may think fit!"

"You must tell us all about it," said Lisbeth, going to Walker, and taking hold of his arm in a coaxing manner. "I am so fond of hearing such stories."

"Then," replied the young officer, "I am heartily sorry that I cannot satisfy your curi-

osity; I do not know the details myself. I only know the result, and I expect to have further intelligence to-morrow morning from my sergeant."

"Then you may be thankful too, Mr. M'Donald," said Lisbeth, turning to him, "that this fearful man can no longer do any harm; for if you had ridden into the bush to-morrow morning, who knows but he might have lain in wait for you and shot you?"

"To-morrow morning!" said Sarah, with an expression of surprise. "Are you going away?"

"Only for a short time, Miss Sarah," he replied, while a slight blush covered his face.

"If I really wish to find suitable pasture-grounds in the neighborhood, I must think of looking for them, or else others will be beforehand with me."

Walker watched him narrowly while he was speaking, and again every drop of blood seemed to have left his cheeks. Did he envy his rival's happiness? His emotion, however, subsided suddenly, and he said:

"Mr. M'Donald is quite right; I myself know several squatters in the Adelaide District who have this country in view, and will not long delay putting their plans into execution."

"But we do not wish to hear that now," said Lisbeth; "tell us some wonderful bush-ranger story. You have long promised to do so, and, as you are going away, I shall lose my story."

"That you shall not," said Walker, laughing; "I made the promise, and I must keep it. Besides, very probably you have not yet heard of the last escape of the celebrated Jack Loudon. Perhaps Mr. M'Donald told you? He was, I believe, at Melbourne very lately, and, no doubt, knows all about it."

"I do," answered M'Donald, with a smile. "But tell the story; the ladies have not yet heard it, and I have no doubt that it will interest them."

"Escape?" said Mr. Powell; "I think they caught him again."

"Yes, I think they did; but for all that he has made his escape, and left the colonies, it was thought, on board a small American schooner. This, however, turned out to be wrong. Perhaps the craft was wrecked upon the coast. I will not, however, anticipate."

"Why, Jack Loudon was transported—I know not wherefore; we seldom learn the causes here—we only have the carrying out of the law. I believe he was transported for life, or for so many years that it is pretty much the same. Very different rumors are in circulation about him."

"Some make him out to be a sort of Rinaldo Rinaldini; having, they say, when he first took to the bush, shown great generosity and nobleness of mind, and kept the wild bands, which made them their chief, in strict order. Others declare that he has committed all sorts of cruelties and crimes; in short, it is difficult to make out the truth of the matter. I am inclined to believe that, although he is so cunning, he is by no means the worst of criminals. At any rate, he deserved punishment, or else he would not have been transported. Having made his escape, and having been again captured, from venturing in the boldest and most foolish manner among his enemies at Melbourne, he was on the last occasion put in irons, and sent to Van Diemen's Land."

"Clothed in yellow and gray, the uniform of the worst class of convicts, he worked with his companions in misfortune, in heavy chains, on the wharves of Eagle Hawk's Neck—a small peninsula whence escape was before considered impossible. The narrow piece of land, only a few hundred paces in breadth, which connects this place with the rest of the island, is not only guarded by armed soldiers, but also by some large and fierce dogs. Escape was considered impossible, while the sea at that place fairly swarmed with sharks, and every white man who attempted to swim over this narrow arm was sure to fall a prey to these hyænas of the deep. One stormy night, when the wind had lashed the sea into foam, and the guards were not inclined to be vigilant, Jack Loudon made his escape. The wind was favorable; as it blew directly toward him from the tongue of land where the dogs were chained, so that they could not scent him beforehand. He managed to free himself from his irons, and he reached without accident the ragged bushy hill which descends toward the dogs in a declivity. The sentry at the top who had retreated, did not perceive him, but the lamps which were

burning brightly, round the dog-kennels, must have shown him as soon as he ventured off the descent, and betrayed him to the sentinel at the bottom. This, however, did not daunt him. The dogs were lying in their casks, only one on the left side was awake, and growling in the rain.

"It appears that he was in the meantime missed by the keeper, and some of them went to give the alarm to the sentries. Perhaps he heard their voices, or feared pursuit; but before the last dog had returned into his cask, he ran down the steep. The sentry at the bottom was not asleep, as the fugitive perhaps hoped; and he had indeed seen him gliding down the rocks. Luckily for him he did not give the alarm immediately, but took a steady aim at him and fired—his gun missed. He immediately shouted to the dogs; but at that moment the fugitive had reached the nearest cask, he rushed past it just as the dog heard his steps, and came out barking furiously. The man would have been lost if the nearest dog had not got entangled in its chain as it rushed out. The other sentry, aroused by this tumult, fired at him, but missed, and in a few seconds he had disappeared in the darkness."

"The convict had even then to pass several posts and run the gantlet with various dangers. How he managed to escape them all is not known. In short, he got off, found his way to Melbourne, and lay there concealed for some time. Driven at last to extremity, he took to the bush; other escaped convicts joined him; and as the magistrates could not muster force enough to capture them, we were sent from Sydney."

"And where was he caught?" asked Lisbeth, who had listened to the tale with the greatest attention.

"I cannot tell you, miss," replied Walker. "The second lieutenant, William, succeeded in cutting him off from the bush, and driving him back toward the settlements; I followed other members of the band. He is said to have been concealed in the swamps, and to have fallen into the hands of the police, dangerously wounded. He will probably, unless something worse awaits him, be sent to Norfolk Island, and have to work in heavy chains. From that place escape is totally impossible."

"And you captured all the rest of the band?" asked George, who seemed to take a lively interest in the recital.

"Yes, almost. There are only a few at large still. I scarcely think we shall ever see them again; they have no doubt perished in the Australian bush, or by the hands of the blacks."

"Yes, but how do you manage?" asked Lisbeth, "when alone you meet with one of these fearful men in the bush? In case he should not surrender at once, is not your life in danger?"

"Yes, very frequently, miss," replied the officer, gravely. "It is our duty to do our best to apprehend the culprit when we have once discovered him; and he, driven to extremity, often risks his life to save his liberty. They do not care much about a murder, more or less, and their punishment can scarcely be made more severe. Catching them is not generally so difficult as keeping them. The worst thing of all is to take a prisoner along with you."

"And how do you manage that?" Lisbeth inquired.

"I will tell you," said Walker. "If you take an interest in the process, I can explain it easily."

Saying these words he took from his breast-pocket a strong double-iron ring, provided with a lock, and held it out toward the young lady.

"Look!" he said, as Lisbeth, who did not know the meaning of the instrument, glanced at it shyly; "these are the so-called 'hand-cuffs,' or 'darbies;' they are placed round the wrist of the prisoner—many have been in these—in this manner. Allow me to show you for a minute."

"No, not on any account!" exclaimed Lisbeth, starting back with a shudder. "I should not sleep the whole night if I once felt the iron round my hands!"

"Are you afraid of them?" he said, laughing; "I am sure you are no bush ranger. Mr. M'Donald, will you show the young lady how it is done? and you will all agree that it is a very simple and excellent instrument. I hope Miss Lisbeth will not be afraid of seeing the irons on another person."

As he said this, he took M'Donald's right hand, and the latter quietly surrendered it to

him. It almost seemed as if a smile played upon the police officer's lips.

"You see, ladies," said Walker, holding M'Donald's hand, round which he had placed the ring, toward them, "this is the way the thing is done. And now," he added, pressing the lock, which fastened with a loud crack, "the prisoner cannot use his arms to defend himself, and would find it very awkward to run away."

"Mr. M'Donald is a prisoner," said 'Lisbeth, laughing.

"My prisoner, IN THE NAME OF THE QUEEN!" Walker said, suddenly, gravely and solemnly placing his hand upon M'Donald's shoulder.

M'Donald stirred not, but boldly confronted his antagonist. Not one muscle of his body moved, only his face had now become as pale as marble.

Why M'Donald seemed so little moved by this sudden, and most unexpected arrest, will be explained by his eventful history; as fully detailed in the sequel to this book, called "The Outlaw Ranger."

"A patient prisoner, at least," said Sarah, who, without knowing why, felt an indescribable anguish in her heart. "Oh, pray, take those irons away; the sight of them makes me shudder."

She stepped forward, as if she were herself about to remove the fetters.

"Jack Loudon," said Walker, with a loud voice, his eyes darting fire, and with outstretched hand pointing at the prisoner, *alias* Murphy, *alias* Bidol, *alias* M'Donald, the outlawed bush ranger of Van Dieman's Land, the fugitive from Eagle Hawk's Neck, the captain of the band just scattered in the Hindmarsh swamp, stands before you! Do you still wish me to take off his fetters?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Sarah, while the rest seemed to have lost the power of speech and motion at the fearful discovery. "M'Donald speak—defend yourself—repudiate this falsehood!"

Walker started back, as if struck by a bullet, and became paler than his prisoner. M'Donald spoke not a word. As he had stretched out his arms to receive the fetters, so he stood still and motionless. His eye caught Sarah's; she met his glance, looked at him for a minute, stretched out her arms toward him, and with a loud cry, fell senseless upon the ground.

THE END.

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